

STANLEY B. AND ANNA GREENBERG: BEATING BUSH ON VALUES

IRAQ:
AMONG
THE SHITES

THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

MARCH 2004

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CAN THE PRESS COME TO LIFE...

and end Bush's free pass?

ERIC ALTERMAN AND MICHAEL TOMASKY

PLUS

A Liberal Dose of Radio

PAUL STARR

Getting Naked in Print

ELIZABETH BENEDICT

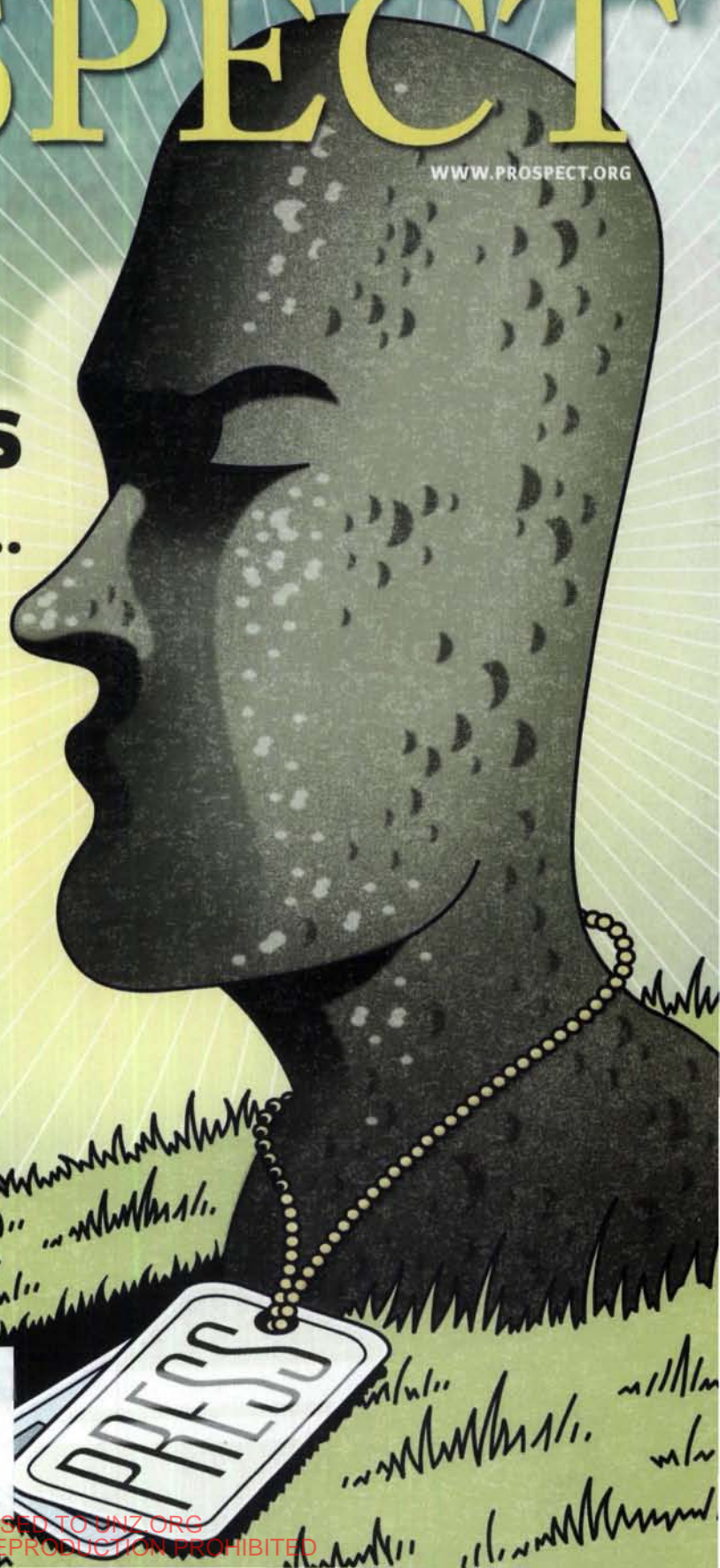
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THE AMERICAN PROSPECT



"Finally, the man paused for breath, and I asked the question that I had come to Iraq to ask: What would bring peace to Iraq?" **PAGE 23**

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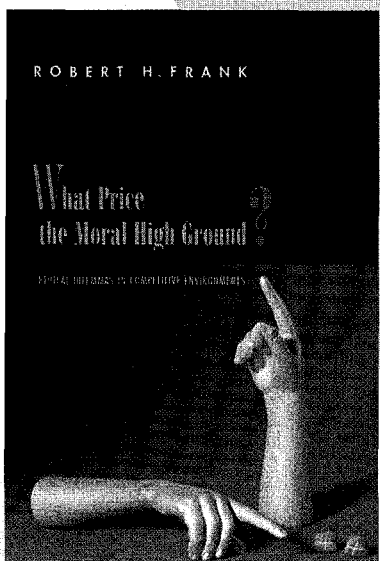
Elizabeth Benedict on the art of the highbrow confessional; **Matthew Yglesias** on whether liberal rage isn't an oxymoron.

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What Price the Moral High Ground?

Ethical Dilemmas in Competitive Environments
Robert H. Frank



Here Robert Frank challenges the notion that doing well is accomplished only at the expense of doing good. Frank presents exciting new work in economics, psychology, and biology to argue that honest individuals often succeed, even in highly competitive environments, because their commitment to principle makes them more attractive as trading partners. Cloth \$27.95

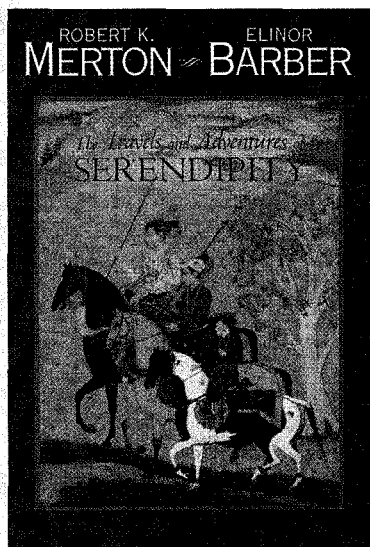
The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity

A Study in Historical Semantics and the Sociology of Science

Robert K. Merton and Elinor G. Barber

With an introduction by James L. Shulman

The pioneering sociologist Robert K. Merton co-authored this book more than 40 years ago, but didn't agree to publish it until he revised it shortly before his death earlier this year at the age of 92. Ostensibly a history of the word "serendipity," it is actually a Merton-esque romp through 250 years of intellectual history. Cloth \$29.95



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Follow the Money

Money corrodes democracy in multiple ways. It influences who gets into politics. It allows the wealthy to speak with a louder voice. It compels candidates to spend inordinate time cultivating donors rather than speaking to voters. The money-and-

politics dilemma has a partisan aspect as well as a civic one, because the people with the most money are usually conservatives. So liberals either remain purist and not financially competitive or go for the big money and risk selling their souls (and alienating their voting base).

Since the 1976 *Buckley v. Valeo* decision, the Supreme Court has defined campaign contributions as tantamount to free speech. Reformers have tried to use public financing to work around that judicial doctrine. But so much private money is available, especially to Republicans, that President Bush decided to forgo public funding for his reelection campaign in favor of unlimited private money. John Kerry, who will raise far less than Bush, felt compelled to follow suit. Nor does Congress have any interest in funding challengers of House and Senate incumbents. At the state level, Maine enacted a public funding law, but business lobbying has defeated similar efforts elsewhere.

THE MCCAIN-FEINGOLD ACT, LONG THE grail of reformers, was finally enacted in 2002, but in badly watered-down form. Its most important provisions ban soft money (unlimited contributions to parties) and limit ostensibly independent ads supporting or opposing candidates within 60 days of a general election.

Many progressives warned that McCain-Feingold, by failing to limit spending, was worse than nothing. Pure good-government types didn't grasp that in a McCain-Feingold world, the right would have new ways to outspend the left, while unions and progressive soft-money donors would face new constraints.

The worst fears of the critics have been more than vindicated. The latest wrinkle is a proposed ruling by the Federal Elections Commission that would only reinforce the Republican-conservative tilt of the whole system. McCain-Feingold explicitly permits unlimited independent expenditures for voter-registration and get-out-the-vote efforts, as well as for organizing drives on behalf of policies or candidates, as long as those efforts are not organizationally coordinated with a candidate's campaign. To ban such activities, Congress and the courts

reasoned, would be to deny citizens free speech.

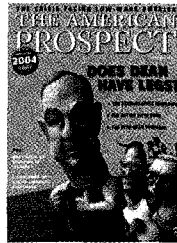
In this new environment, several progressive organizations were formed to accept liberal donations that, in the old days, would have gone to the Democratic Party. These groups, so-called 527s (after the section of the tax code authorizing them), will organize voters to oppose Bush's reelection, independently of the Democratic Party. Right-wing groups like the NRA will play the same game against the Democrats. The liberal 527s may end up spending tens of millions of dollars, but liberal and Democratic groups as a whole will, if current trends continue, be outspent better than 2 to 1 by Republican and conservative ones.

**Republicans on the
Federal Elections
Commission want
to muzzle liberal
non-profit groups.**

NOW, HOWEVER, THE REPUBLICANS ON the FEC are trying to make it illegal for 527s—and even for ordinary nonprofits—to take positions on public issues that explicitly or implicitly criticize the president. The proposed ruling would prohibit the use of tax-exempt money that “promotes, supports, attacks, or opposes” any candidate for federal office, including comments on a candidate's record or proposed policies [see Harold Meyerson, “Numbers Game,” page 11]. If this is upheld, not only would the new liberal 527s be out of business, but the exemplary work of, say, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which has been a truth squad on Bush's budget misrepresentations, would be deemed partisan and illegal. Even the Red Cross could be barred from criticizing or supporting legislation on the blood supply if it incidentally supported or criticized a Bush policy. This stance, mind you, comes after the viciously partisan “Arkansas Project,” aimed at destroying Bill Clinton at all costs, was financed mainly by tax-exempt foundation money—without the FEC saying a word.

For the three decades of its existence, the FEC has been an utterly toothless watchdog. Now, suddenly, it has come to life in an effort to widen the right's financial advantage and strangle Bush's critics. Last month, I wrote an article headlined “America as a One-Party State” on all the ways the right is seeking to make the Republican regime permanent. Here's yet another one. The hits keep on coming.

—ROBERT KUTTNER



"Democrats should contest the southern states vigorously even if there is no chance of winning any of them."

—GUS RABSON, Via e-mail

Correspondence

We HAVA Problem

THE IMPORTANCE OF scrutinizing "process"—not merely issues and character—in a political campaign is ably demonstrated by Robert Kuttner in "America as a One-Party State" [February 2004]. As an increasing number of American voters turn to sources of information that permit more in-depth political analysis, more will be exposed to the issues that Kuttner highlights.

However, in pointing out the flaws of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), Kuttner fails to cite the element of the law that makes it a true Trojan horse, and the omission is surprising given Kuttner's classification of the 2000 Florida debacle as a "theft." The Republican majority's capacity to suppress Democratic votes is far more amplified by the centralization of voter rolls in the offices of state secretaries than by "ballot security" programs. Mr. Kuttner should be aware that the infamous purging in 2000 of Florida's voter rolls—ostensibly of felons—led to the exclusion of thousands of nonfelons, including many African Americans who intended to vote for Al Gore but were turned away at the polls.

Now that HAVA requires each state's secretary to maintain centralized voter rolls, Republicans may not

hesitate to follow the example set by Katherine Harris, tailoring purges according to individual state criteria for disenfranchisement. Therefore, the pertinent premise is not Kuttner's "if a variation of the 2000 Florida theft is attempted in 2004." The 2004 theft is already in progress.

THOR ERICKSON
Laguna Beach, CA

Reich? Wrong.

ROBERT REICH'S PROPOSALS to help American workers without being protectionist don't pass the laugh test ["It's Jobs, Stupid," February]. Reich proposes to allow corporations full deductibility of payroll for outsourcing of jobs to American workers, but only 50 percent deductibility if foreign workers are hired. If anyone has trouble recognizing this as protectionist, just imagine that purchases of foreign steel were only 50 percent deductible, while purchases of domestic steel were 100 percent deductible.

In many ways the spread of foreign outsourcing, especially to high-end jobs, is a positive development. It might prompt greater clarity of thought among economists and other intellectuals. The issue has never been free trade versus protectionism. Rather, the question is which jobs will

be placed in competition with low-cost labor in the developing world, and which jobs will be protected. Until recently, professional and licensing restrictions had largely protected more highly educated workers. Now that the Internet is overcoming some of these barriers, maybe better-educated workers will be able to identify more with the plight of blue-collar workers who have been competing with low-paid labor for decades.

DEAN BAKER
Co-Director
Center for Economic and
Policy Research
Washington, DC

Dixie Nix?

THE ARTICLES BY KEVIN Phillips, Cliff Schecter, and Ruy Teixeira featured in your "All Eyes on Dixie" debate [February] were very insightful, but they missed a point that historian Dan T. Carter (author of *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*) made in an interview with Bill Moyers.

Carter argued that the Democrats should contest the southern states vigorously even if there is no chance of winning any of them. Otherwise the Republicans can continue to pose as compassionate moderates and win votes in the more liberal states. By contesting the Republicans in the

southern states, Democrats will force Republicans to drop their disguise and reaffirm their credentials with the lunatic fringe that makes up so much of their support.

GUS RABSON
Via e-mail

Not My Savior

MICHAEL TOMASKY ["IS IT Time to Believe?" January] wrote that Bill Clinton rebuilt the Democratic Party, "indeed, he saved it." Clinton's political accomplishments are regularly overstated. His election to the presidency was courtesy of Ross Perot, who split the Republican vote and denied George Bush Senior re-election. The final numbers in 1992 were: Clinton, 43 percent; Bush, 38 percent; Perot, 19 percent.

Then, in his first two years, Clinton's mistakes resulted in the catastrophic losses of the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives to the Republican Party. This 1994 defeat has had enormous consequences throughout American society, fixing the nation with our current one-party rule.

Bill Clinton, a political genius? Not by the numbers. Not by the political results.

JEROME GROSSMAN
Served on the Democratic
National Committee,
1972–1980
Wellesley, MA

Wage Rage

KUDOS TO *THE AMERICAN Prospect* for your special report on "Low-Wage America" [January]. It is a story that needs telling, but is rarely a subject of interest to the media.

Among your authors' policy proposals to correct America's growing income inequality is an increase in the federal minimum wage, which has been stuck at \$5.15 per hour since September 1997. The Campaign for a Fair Minimum Wage—a coalition of more than 200 religious, civil-rights, labor, women's, children's, and public-policy advocacy groups—has lobbied the Congress relentlessly for almost seven years now to achieve a decent, modest increase in the federal minimum wage. The politically powerful business community has worked just as relentlessly to thwart any increase. But the progressive Democrats in the House and the Senate, led by Representative George Miller and Senator Ted Kennedy, will try again in this session of Congress to raise the issue and get a vote on a minimum-wage increase.

The value of the minimum wage has declined over these last seven years to a disgraceful level, but we should remember that it was not ever thus. In the 1950s and '60s, the minimum wage was approximately 50 percent of

the average hourly wage.

If that were true today, the minimum wage would be \$7.70. The annual earnings of a minimum-wage worker in the 1960s and '70s equaled, and even exceeded, the poverty line for a family of three. Today, a minimum-wage worker would have to make \$7.05 per hour to meet that poverty threshold.

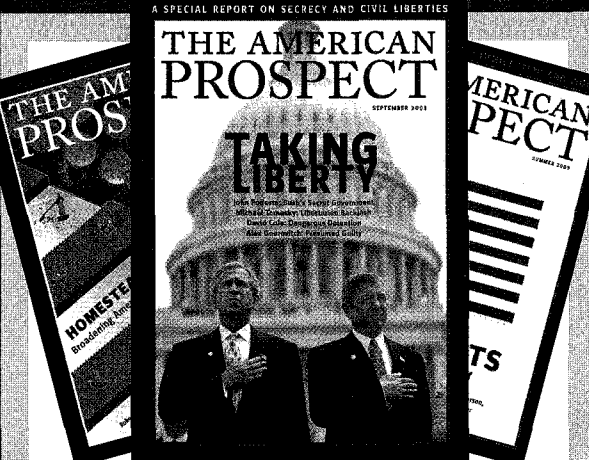
An increase in the federal minimum wage is only one step toward closing the wage gap. Harold Meyerson's article on Las Vegas workers ["Las Vegas as a Workers' Paradise"] demonstrates how bad jobs (low wage) can become good jobs (decent wage) through unionization. In places where unions have won bargaining rights, wages for so-called bad jobs (e.g., grocery clerks, sanitation workers, janitors) are twice or triple the current minimum wage.

Raising the minimum wage and protecting workers' rights to union representation would certainly turn more bad jobs into good ones—to the benefit of us all.

JANE O'GRADY
Executive Director
Campaign for a Fair
Minimum Wage
Washington, DC

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A SPECIAL REPORT ON SECRECY AND CIVIL LIBERTIES




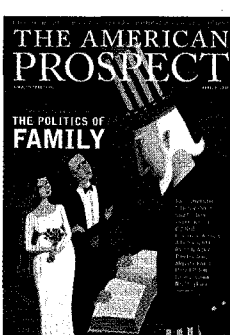
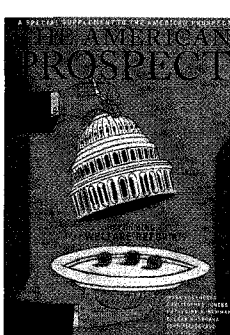
SETTING AN AGENDA

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Devil in the



Goo Goo G'joob: Yellow-matter custard, dripping from a lying idiot's eye

He Is the Eggman

WITH MILLIONS OF AMERICANS on the Atkins Diet, nobody would disagree that it's a big year for eggs. But who knew that so many would be headed straight for FOX News? Certainly not FOX viewers—who, admittedly, have already proven themselves vulnerable to misinformation, and who were led to believe that, by this point, Iraq weapons of mass destruction skeptics far and wide would be protein-covered and apologizing profusely.

When we find those

weapons, "[A] lot of people are going to have a lot of egg on their face," warned Sean Hannity of *Hannity & Colmes* last February 7—and February 19, and March 18, and July 18, and August 1.

But, as former chief weapons inspector David Kay and the woman on *My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé* will tell you, things don't always work out as planned. In fact, much to the dismay of this administration, Kay's long-awaited and recently released report showed nary a weapon of mass destruc-

tion but, instead, a big, fat egg. From the channel that's taken reality TV to new heights (or depths), viewers should expect nothing less than a televised interoffice food fight, in which Hannity and his conservative cohorts pelt one another with their due yolks. Or an apology.

Americans were promised at least that much last March, when (on the same day as Hannity's aforementioned egg warning) FOX's Bill O'Reilly told *Good Morning America*, "[I]f the Americans go in and over-

throw Saddam Hussein and it's clean, he has nothing, I will apologize to the nation, and I will not trust the Bush administration again." A Web site, www.oreilly-sucks.com, kept an upwardly ticking day-hour-minute-second counter, waiting for the glorious day.

Well, lo and behold! On February 10—just six days after the *Prospect* called FOX to inquire about it! Hmmm—O'Reilly actually apologized. Appearing on *Good Morning America*, 328 days after his pledge, O'Reilly came clean: "I was wrong. I am not pleased about it at all. And I think all Americans should be concerned about this."

Of course, his remorse was far from overwhelming. At one point, feeling badgered by his *Good Morning America* interlocutor (what kind of television host would treat a guest *that way?*), he sniffed, "What do you want me to do, go over and kiss the camera?" He also tried to deflect some blame from George W. Bush and toss it in the direction of CIA Director George Tenet.

But still, it *was* the menschy thing to do. Now maybe he can apologize for calling the American Civil Liberties Union a "fascist organization that used lawyers instead of Panzers," or for going on the *Today*

Details

"Please elaborate on that a little bit.
A war of choice or war of necessity?"

—PRESIDENT BUSH, asking NBC's Tim Russert
to explain what was a pretty obvious question

show and bragging that he sold more books than Al Franken the week Franken's mother died.

Which brings us back to Hannity, who clearly considers a change of heart among the highest of offenses. While Hannity hasn't yet attacked O'Reilly's about-face or just admitted he was wrong, he's recently ditched the egg routine for a new hobby (wise move). The current strategy seems to be trying to widen the circle of wrongness, mostly by harping on John Kerry's 2002 Iraq vote. "Why did [Kerry] vote to authorize that war?," Hannity asked Democratic strategist Ellis Hennican on January 30. He continued, "Now he's flip-flopped because there's no core values and principles." Just stunned that Kerry could criticize the war, Hannity calls the senator's "biggest vulnerability" his "flip-flopping and wavering positions on issues even like Iraq."

Hannity, you see, is a model of "core values." He shows no sign of wavering—he'd rather be wrong.

—HEIDI PAUKEN

World to End in 2009

PRESIDENT BUSH JUSTIFIED his first round of tax cuts by invoking the rosy 10-

year forecast of a \$5.6 trillion surplus.

But now that the 10-year economic picture is one of doom, gloom, and the occasional breadline, Bush has taken an almost reassuringly apocalyptic approach to promoting another \$900-some billion in tax cuts: Blot out the upcoming decade, the 2010s, from the official budget. This budget is only concerned with the next five years; the proposed tax cuts would pull roughly \$800 billion out of the federal wallet after that time frame, but why bother a busy public with that detail?

The 10-year forecast, introduced under Bill Clinton, is certainly an imperfect crystal ball. But it was never intended to predict the future. It's meant to demonstrate roughly what will come if current policies are left unchanged—in this case, a colossal fiscal crisis. Bush has consistently backloaded his proposals, putting the highest costs in a bill's second five years. His original 2001 tax cut cost \$500 billion in the first five years and more than \$1.1 trillion in the second. Lifetime Savings Accounts, the Medicare expansion, the Future Year Defense Plan—all cost far less in their first five years than afterward.

Omitting the true costs of these programs allows Bush to ignore the fact that even

if he does meet his improbable goal of halving the deficit by 2009, the deficit will nose back downward immediately thereafter. This is more fact than speculation: Economists at the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities and the Brookings Institution—as well as those free-spending flower children over at Goldman-Sachs—all project

a deficit above \$5 trillion over the next decade. As first reported by *The Wall Street Journal*, the budget itself admits this, deep in the intimidating "Analytical Perspectives" segment, which reads, "Long-run budget projections show clearly that the budget is on an unsustainable path."

Bush is clearly focused on a different unsustain-

VAST RIGHT-WING CONSPIRACY



President Bush is hastily recycling his old policy ideas to fit a new election-year agenda. In advance of the State of the Union in mid-January, the administration leaked word of a \$1.5 billion "healthy marriages" proposal aimed at encouraging marriage among low-income people. Meanwhile, Bush operatives are working out how best to prevent marriage among gay people. How do the two square?

The marriage initiative serves as a convenient—if oblique—proxy for the volatile issue of gay marriage, but there is nothing new about the reform. Marriage was a welfare-reform priority in 1996. And last summer, the administration's plan for welfare reauthorization included an identical marriage component, though the entire package stalled out in Congress.

This latest incarnation is aimed to convince Bush's far-right base that he is serious about the sanctity of marriage. It was a move intended to pacify conservative Christians who are pushing for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, and it didn't work. "You see him inching in the right direction," Glenn Stanton, of Focus on the Family, told *The New York Times* prior to the address. "But the question for us is: Why this inching? Why not just get there?" The simple answer: A ban on gay marriage could alienate key voters in November. Centrist Republicans are turned off by shrill anti-gay rhetoric. And federalist-minded conservatives abhor any meddling with the Constitution.

Bush's marriage proposal is the social-welfare equivalent of a manned mission to Mars. As a diversion from thorny, politicized issues like gay marriage and comprehensive welfare policy, it's pretty clever. But a cure for poverty it isn't.

—Ayelish McGarvey



BRAVE NEW WORDS

DUTY Pulling strings to avoid combat in Vietnam, taking six months off to work on a campaign, skipping a physical exam and losing flight certification, then pulling more strings to get discharged eight months early.

FRANCE'S PILOT FISH Belgium, according to authors Richard Perle and David Frum.

SEVERAL YEARS A few weeks, or perhaps no time at all, according to President Bush's quote about the time he spent flying an F-102 in the National Guard.

able path—the one to his re-election if he actually leveled with people.

—JEFF DUBNER

Beverly Bayoubillies

WHILE THE WORLD WAITS to see if *Lost in Translation* can best *The Return of the King* at the February 29 Academy Awards, the other question hanging over Hollywood is who will replace Jack Valenti, who plans to step down as chief lobbyist for the major film studios as soon as a successor can be found to head the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA).

The group's first choice for the position was Representative Billy Tauzin, a Louisiana Democrat turned Republican with a well-deserved reputation as a water carrier for lobbyists of innumerable stripes. Before getting the offer from the MPAA, which is worth more than \$1 million per year, Tauzin was already performing distinguished service for Big Movie by using his position as chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee to pressure the Federal Communications Commis-

sion into adopting "broadcast flag" rules for digital television. Tauzin's proposal would force television manufacturers to modify their product so as to be unable to record any specially marked digital-TV restrictions. The goal, ostensibly, is to prevent viewers from recording televised movies and then distributing them over the Internet, but in practice it would prevent *all* television recording, including constitutionally protected "fair use," such as digitally "taping" an episode of a favorite show or film to watch at a more convenient time.

Tauzin's efforts on this front, however, pale in comparison to his work shepherding the president's \$540 billion giveaway to the pharmaceutical industry masquerading as a Medicare prescription-drug benefit. As a reward, PHARMA, the drug companies' lobbying group, offered Tauzin an even more generous post-retirement job, which he accepted, leaving the MPAA in the lurch.

Hollywood seems to have turned to another Louisianan, Senator John Breaux, who joined with Senator Max Baucus to break ranks with the Democratic caucus and lend a veneer of bipartisanship to the Medicare bill. Like Tauzin, however,

Breaux has found the time to serve multiple masters and assist his friends in the movie business by co-sponsoring the Consumer Broadband and Digital Television Protection Act, which would require all consumer electronics manufacturers to adopt and implement a single digital-rights management standard to prevent file copying. Not only would the bill thereby stifle all efforts at competition and innovation in this field, it would also pose a grave threat to legally protected fair use.

Under the act, it would remain legal to, say, copy a CD you own onto an mp3 player for use in the gym. But anyone manufacturing a product capable of doing so would face criminal sanctions, as would any consumer who modifies a device so as to allow copying. Whether or not this suffices to land Breaux a cushy job remains to be seen, but a "Best End Run Around the First Amendment" award would seem to be in order.

—MATTHEW YGLESIAS

A Modern Kind of Guy

WHAT DO WE KNOW about the mysterious Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani? Well, he's a democrat—for now, anyway, supporting speedy elections in Iraq, much to the chagrin of U.S. officials who were hoping to use their own team, the Iraqi National Congress, to set up a government. Al-Sistani won't have it, though. He wants all Iraqis to be able to vote—and not in the caucuses recently proposed by U.S. officials as a compro-

mise. (How he'll feel about democracy once *he* has power is another question.)

So what else? The 73-year-old spiritual leader may be the "pre-eminent religious authority among the Shia," according to a Radio Free Europe writer. But for a Muslim cleric, he's a rather open-minded fellow.

First of all, he listens to arguments. "He respects everybody's opinion and every objective point," attests his Web site, www.sistani.org. "He keeps reading and researching all the time." He's known for "Discussing Subjects Politely." "He always tries to use polite phrases, and always does his best to keep the scholars' respect and veneration."

Al-Sistani is a man of the world, too. "He is rather a well-educated personality," the Web site contends. "He is acquainted with most of contemporary knowledges and civilizations and has modernized thoughts and opinions."

There's more. Deeply attuned to the caprices of love, al-Sistani allows for marriages that last only a day. "If there is no marriage contract," he explains, "they are as strangers to each other." Sodomy is also allowed "with the consent of both husband and wife." Even oral sex passes muster, provided—well, look it up yourself.

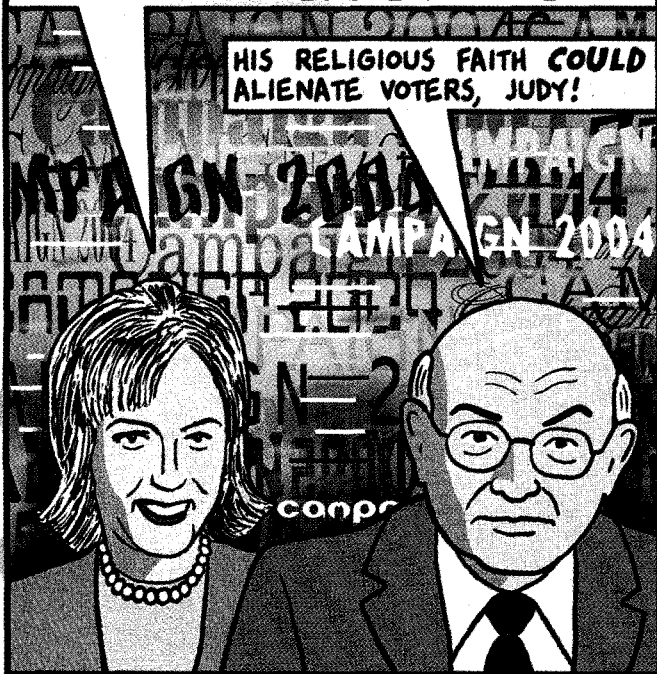
It seems al-Sistani is more tolerant than many religious leaders in the United States. And yet the current administration doesn't seem to mistrust *them*—at least we haven't brought in international authorities to monitor our elections. Although, come to think of it, back in 2000, perhaps we should have.

—TARA MCKELVEY

WHAT IF A SPECIFIC REGION OF THE COUNTRY WERE DISPROPORTIONATELY INFLUENTIAL IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS?

AND THE QUESTION IS--CAN A CANDIDATE FROM THE **DEEP SOUTH** WIN THE ALL-IMPORTANT **NORTHEASTERN VOTE**?

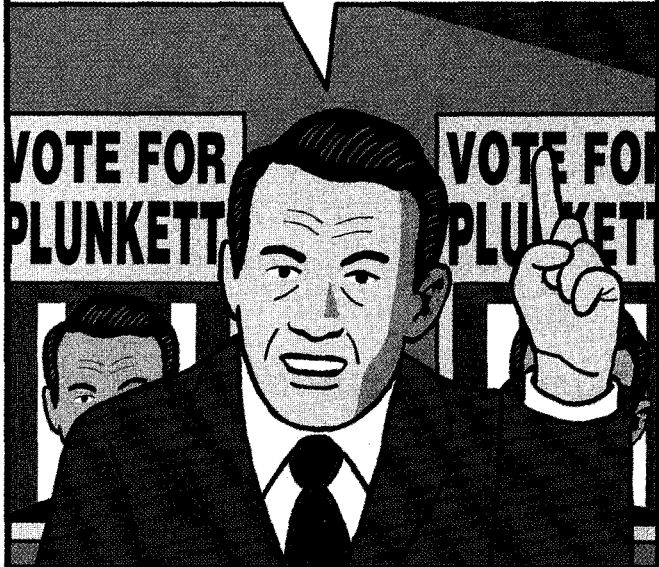
HIS RELIGIOUS FAITH **COULD** ALIENATE VOTERS, JUDY!



WHAT IF CANDIDATES HAD TO PANDER SHAMELESSLY TO VOTERS OF THAT REGION DURING THE PRIMARY SEASON?

SURE, I'VE BEEN TO CHURCH OCCASIONALLY-- BUT I NEVER REALLY PAID MUCH **ATTENTION!**

I'M **MUCH** MORE OF A **SECULAR HUMANIST** AT HEART!



AND WHAT IF THIS PROMPTED OPPOSITION GROUPS TO PRODUCE ADS PERPETUATING THE MOST SHALLOW STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE APPARENT FRONTRUNNER'S HOME REGION?

I THINK HE SHOULD TAKE HIS GUN-LOVING, BEER-GUZZLING, FRIED-FOOD-EATING, PICKUP-TRUCK-DRIVING--

--POLYESTER-WEARING, FOX-NEWS-WATCHING RIGHT WING FREAKSHOW BACK TO THE **SOUTH**--WHERE IT **BELONGS!**



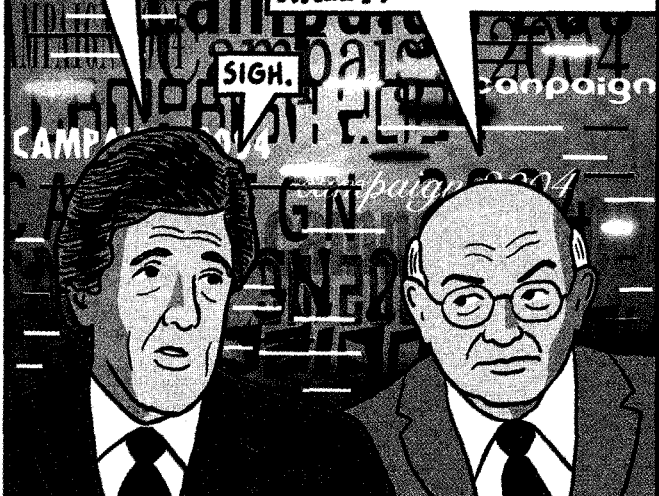
FORTUNATELY, NOTHING LIKE THAT COULD EVER **REALLY** HAPPEN.

SENATOR KERRY, CAN YOU HONESTLY SAY THAT YOU **LOVE JESUS** AS MUCH AS **SOUTHERN** VOTERS DO?

UM--SURE I DO.

WHAT ABOUT **MONSTER TRUCK RALLIES**? HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO A **MONSTER TRUCK RALLY**?

SIGH.



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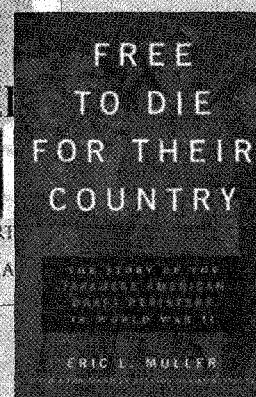
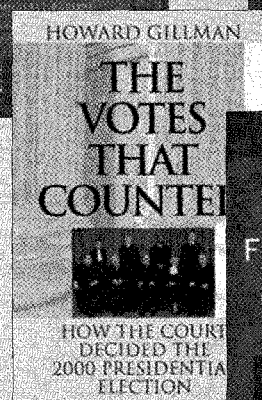
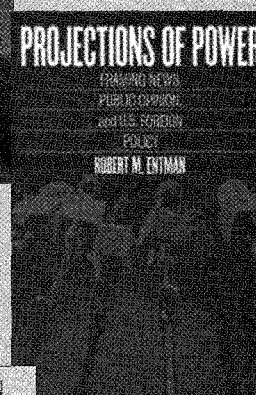
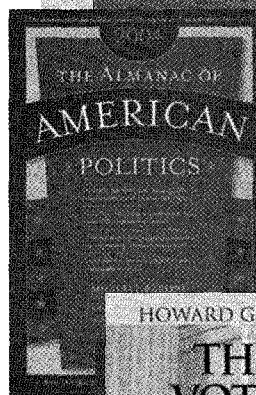
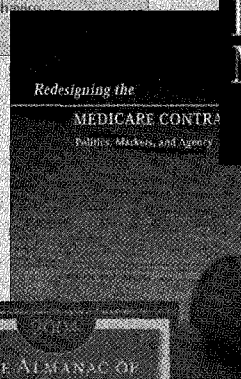
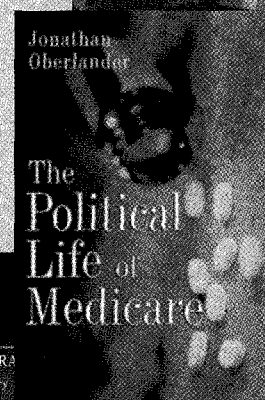
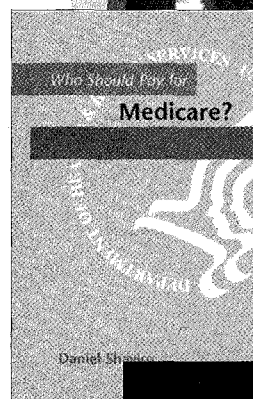
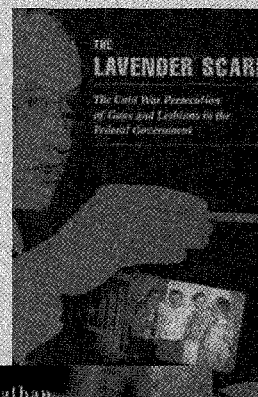
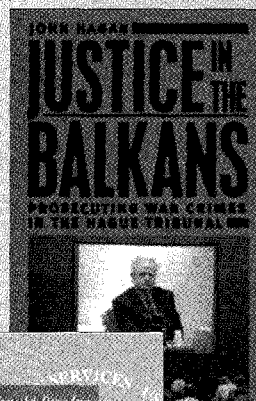
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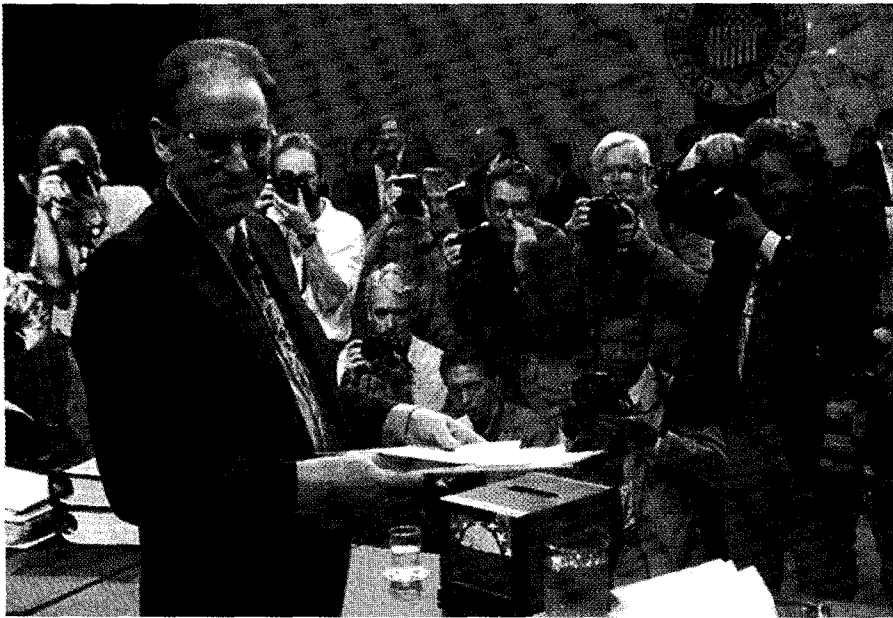
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Dispatches



Shutter Down?: Harold Ickes heads a progressive group whose efforts are threatened by the latest GOP ploy.

Numbers Game

Since McCain-Feingold, “527s” have been invaluable to the Democrats’ 2004 strategy. So what are the Republicans trying to do? Eliminate them.

BY HAROLD MEYERSON

ST. LOUIS, MO. — ON AN ARCTIC Friday afternoon, the Democrats’ secret weapons in the 2004 election come in out of the cold. Eight canvassers for the Missouri Progressive Vote Coalition—Pro-Vote, for short—return to their office with another 160 or so newly signed voter-registration forms, after a day spent gathering signatures on buses and in public-health clinics in St. Louis’ African American neighborhoods.

Over the preceding two weeks, the Pro-Vote canvassers have been sending in 950 new registrations a week to the St. Louis registrar. Over the preceding several months, in tandem with the

Missouri Partnership for America’s Families, they’ve registered 45,000 new black voters in St. Louis and Kansas City. George W. Bush carried Missouri over Al Gore by a scant 78,695 votes (out of 2.34 million cast) in the 2000 presidential election, and it is clearly a key swing state in this year’s contest.

These are Steve Rosenthal’s legions. He is the central figure in several “527s”—organizations, named for a section of the tax code, that Democratic activists have established to do the voter mobilization and advertising campaigns that the party itself can no longer do under the McCain-Feingold

campaign-finance law. Rosenthal has put together early-registration campaigns in Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and now Florida.

The results have been overwhelming. Partnership for America’s Families, a union-funded 527 that Rosenthal heads, first set up shop in Philadelphia last summer, and in short order registered 86,000 black and Hispanic Philadelphians. John Hickey, the executive director of Pro-Vote, says that after his project had submitted thousands of signatures, an official on the St. Louis election board called with a plaintive question. “Can’t you just stop for a week?” he asked.

There are, in fact, a lot of people who would like Rosenthal to stop. They are almost entirely Republicans. And they have launched a legal challenge to the 527s that, if successful, could give the Republicans a huge advantage in the 2004 elections—and, almost as an afterthought, fairly devastate the First Amendment, too.

THE 527S ARE BEST UNDERSTOOD AS the Democrats’ way to stay even with the Republicans in the wake of the enactment of McCain-Feingold—which, under the guise of taking money out of politics, has magnified the Republicans’ financial advantage over the Democrats. The law took aim at big money in politics, knocking out the unrestricted donations—known as soft money—that flowed to the parties for voter registration and advertising. To compensate for abolishing unrestricted donations to the parties, it doubled the amount an individual could give to a candidate to \$2,000, and the maximum amount an individual could give to all candidates per two-year election cycle from \$50,000 to \$95,000.

Problem is, the Democrats were far more reliant on soft money—largely

from unions and major show-business and finance contributors—than the Republicans for turning out the vote. In 1999, for instance, Republican Party committees raised \$156 million in hard and soft money combined, while the Democrats raised \$110 million. In 2003, with soft money abolished in midyear and the ceilings on hard money raised, the Republican total rose to \$206 million (which does not include the \$200 million that the Bush-Cheney campaign plans to have on hand within a few weeks), while the Democrats saw their total shrink to \$95 million.

For the Democrats this was obviously a crisis, but also an opportunity. They conceived a new range of organizations that would in effect privatize the Democratic Party. The new 527s could still collect those mega-soft-money donations so long as they had no commu-

nications with the official party bodies. Better still, they were led by respected strategists such as Rosenthal, who heads both the partnership and America Coming Together, and former Clinton stalwart Harold Ickes, who heads the Media Fund. What's more, they were backed by the largest and most politically savvy unions, along with megadonors, including George Soros and Peter Lewis of Progressive Insurance, who each pledged \$10 million.

The Republicans, meanwhile, made no discernible efforts to start up 527s of their own—at least, until November 18 of last year, when three old GOP hands sent a letter to the Federal Elections Commission on behalf of a fake 527 called Americans for a Better Country (ABC). In a diabolically clever ploy, they described in minute detail a vast range of campaign activities that ABC was planning to undertake and asked the FEC to issue a ruling as to the legality of those activities.

Of course, there was no ABC. The activities described in the letter were plainly culled from press accounts of the Democratic 527s. The three even asked the commission to tell them the ramifications if they hired “[t]he former chief of staff to a member of the congressional leadership”—an unmistakable reference to Cecile Richards, who heads one of the Democrats’ 527s and who was deputy chief of staff to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi before that. By filing the query to the FEC in ABC’s name, the ABC Three ensured that any FEC decision that proscribed some of their hypothetical practices—and the 527s’ real ones—could not be appealed by the actual 527s, for they had no standing in the case.

On January 29, FEC general counsel Lawrence Norton issued a draft advisory opinion that not only threatened to curtail the 527s but virtually every advocacy group in American public life. (The FEC commissioners may de-

By filing the query in their name, the ABC Three ensured that any FEC decision that proscribed their practices couldn’t be appealed by the actual 527s.

Such a decision, however, would go well beyond the 527s. If a communication said that President Bush and Congress “have led the fight in Congress for a stronger defense” and told the audience to “call them and tell them to keep fighting for you,” Norton wrote that communication could not be paid for with soft money.

With that, Norton threatened the existence of groups that may never involve themselves in elections but do lobby and inform their members of issues before Congress and the administration. At first, his draft opinion was to be taken up by the FEC at its February 5 meeting. But the alarm bells were sounding across

nonprofit America. On February 4, 324 such organizations signed a letter to the commission objecting to the opinion. In an accompanying release, the People For the American Way wrote, “It could be virtually impossible for groups other than federal [political action committees] to criticize and commend members of Congress or President Bush for anything they say or do if the commissioners approve the draft.”

The signatory groups included such usual suspects as People For the American Way, the Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, Planned Parenthood, and the National Abortion Rights Action League. But the protesting groups also included such far-flung entries as the American Lung Association, the Cleveland Tenants Organization, the American Jewish Committee, the Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky, and the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation. Confronted with this storm of criticism, the FEC delayed its decision until it meets again on February 18. Even Public Citizen, after noting its involvement in the fight for McCain-Feingold, expressed concern that nothing in the opinion limited the fund-raising restrictions to 527s, but threatened, rather, to extend them to the “legitimate activities of all nonprofit organizations.” (Common Cause was conspicuous by its absence from the fray.)

Only three small campaign-finance-reform organizations stuck up for the opinion. Fred Wertheimer, who heads Democracy 21, contends that Norton’s opinion doesn’t refer to all nonprofits. And in a stunning display of Republican discipline, not one of the conservative organizations that have traditionally opposed FEC restrictions on campaign activities—among them the National Rifle Association and the anti-abortion groups—have said a word about Norton’s opinion, though their own activities would clearly be curtailed should the FEC adopt the opinion.

Republican discipline, or the lack thereof, may ultimately determine the fate of the nonprofits and the 527s. By law, the six FEC commissioners are divided equally between the two parties. One of the Democrats, lame duck Scott Thomas, has spent three decades at the commission, first as a staffer, then as a

member for the past 18 years. He wanted one more term, but labor, fearing he'd support a version of reform that would make it impossible for Democrats to achieve a level playing field, prevailed upon congressional Democrats not to renew his membership. "He's very angry about not getting reappointed; it's his entire professional life," says one commission insider. Democrats fear that an embittered Thomas may vote to uphold Norton's recommendations. But some hope that the FEC's new chairman, Republican Bradley Smith, a longtime opponent of regulating campaign-related fund raising and speech, may not toe the party line. "I would imagine he is trying to weigh his philosophy against the partisan imperatives of 2004," says one attorney who specializes in election law.

Many on the Republican right have long spoken of "defunding the left." The FEC opinion is a step in that direction, and certainly part of a deliberate strategy to stop the Democrats in the midst of a hugely promising voter-registration effort. In a clear attempt to scare off prospective donors to the Democratic groups, the GOP chairman of the Committee on House Administration, Ohio's Bob Ney, has vowed to subpoena the records of the 527s and is threatening to subpoena such principles as Rosenthal, Ickes, and Soros.

"I can't remember an incident since the McCarthy era," says Larry Gold, an attorney who represents a number of the leading 527s, "when an ongoing political organization had to prove it's complying with the law when there are no credible allegations that it's not." ■

Bush. There was little outcry over the administration's failure to censure China before the United Nations Human Rights Commission in March 2003, the first time the United States has failed to do so in five years. The spy scandal involving Republican Party fund-raiser Katrina Leung, unlike the trumped-up case against Wen Ho Lee or Clinton's alleged links to Chinese campaign contributions, quickly disappeared from the news.

This is no mere partisan politics. The severest critics of China have pulled their punches because the Bush administration continues to back containment of Beijing's military ambitions and is pressuring the European Union not to lift its own arms embargo on China. More importantly to the anti-China bloc, Bush—at least initially—fulfilled his promise to beef up relations with Taiwan. A multibillion-dollar arms deal struck in April 2001 will provide Taiwan with U.S. submarines for the first time. Taiwanese officials visiting the United States, including President Chen Shui-bian in November 2003, have enjoyed greater freedom of movement and access to U.S. officials (although Chen is still not allowed to come to Washington—that would push Beijing over the edge). Joyce Shieh, head of the Formosan Association for Public Affairs, notes approvingly that "doing is more important than saying it loudly." George W. Bush is the "secret guardian angel" of Taiwan, according to Therese Shaheen of the American Institute in Taiwan.

Taiwan has upset this delicate balance, however, by pulling a California. Chen Shui-bian and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have called a public referendum to coincide with Taiwan's presidential elections on March 20. Encouraged by warmer relations with Washington, the DPP is hoping to appeal directly to the electorate and thus bypass a parliament narrowly controlled by factions of the former ruling Nationalist Party, which are reluctant to rile China. In the referendum, the DPP is expected to ask voters whether they support a military upgrade and/or the pursuit of talks with Beijing on equal footing. The party wants to counter China's enhanced

One China? Two Headaches

The Bush administration has danced with both China and Taiwan. But a Taiwanese referendum set for March 20 will force it to choose sides.

BY JOHN FEEFFER

BACKING BOTH THE FAVORITE AND THE underdog in a boxing match might win points for evenhandedness, but it would leave sports fans scratching their heads. In the battle of affections between China and Taiwan, though, the Bush administration has done just that.

Both countries have been led to believe that they are enjoying the best relations with Washington in years. While this win-win stratagem stands in sharp contrast to the administration's divide-and-rule policies elsewhere in the world, it also contradicts a key element of George W. Bush's foreign policy—the promotion of democracy—and has irked some Bush supporters who are China critics. With presidential elections coming up in both Taiwan and the United States, the administration is now under pressure to take sides.

Four years ago, Bush sang a different tune. As a presidential candidate, he rebuked the Clinton administration

for being too soft on Beijing. But when a candidate becomes president, he soon comes to understand that 1.3 billion Chinese are not easily ignored. China's huge and growing economy has U.S. businesses slaving.

Bush has acted accordingly. Although China's downing of an EP-3 spy plane in April 2001 heightened tensions, the Bush administration's reaction was restrained. After September 11, the love fest really took off. China signed on to the war on terrorism, pressured North Korea to negotiate, and downplayed its criticism of the Iraq War. Bush held several high-profile meetings with Chinese leaders that cemented the new relations, culminating in the inclusion of one of Beijing's bugbears, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, on the U.S. State Department's terrorism list.

Had Bill Clinton cozied up to Beijing in this way, his critics would have gone ballistic. Yet the so-called China bashers have largely muted their criticism of

missile capabilities but has faced opposition within the old guard of the Taiwanese military as to the high price of U.S. weaponry, as well as to the Pentagon's insistence on force modernization. Cross-straits relations, while booming in the arenas of trade and investment, have made no progress in the political realm.

Beijing's rejection of the referendum has been predictable, as the DPP is pushing for a triple threat of greater democracy, military buildup, and independence. The Bush administration, meanwhile, has played the role of wild card. First, it

[supportive] policies toward Taiwan." Meanwhile, China critic Ross Munro, writing in the *National Review*, has accused the Taiwanese president of "recklessly" using the referendum to buoy support for his own party "at the expense of the vital national interests of the United States."

The fear in Washington is that the DPP is risking a regional crisis merely to get its supporters to the polls on March 20. The DPP sees things differently. "Chen Shui-bian and the Democratic Progressive Party are perceived as pushing the envelope too fast, too far," says

says Alan Romberg, senior associate at the Henry L. Stimson Center. "The greatest threat to democracy in Taiwan is war."

The Bush administration's challenge has been to avoid war between Taiwan and China while encouraging democracy in both countries. It has largely sacrificed the latter in favor of the former, despite paeans such as Bush's November 2003 speech before the National Endowment of Democracy. James Mann, former *Los Angeles Times* correspondent and author of *About Face*, points out that Clinton went much further than Bush in vocally supporting democracy by explicitly making the settlement of Taiwan's future contingent on the assent of the people of Taiwan. Explains Mann, "[Clinton] didn't use the word 'democracy,' but that was much closer to a Wilsonian view than anyone had taken. I haven't heard the Bush administration repeat that phrase."

Democracy, it turns out, is a tricky thing. Referendums and elections in Taiwan potentially disturb the geopolitical balance; democracy in China, if pushed too hard, interferes with business and prosecuting the war on terrorism.

And there's American democracy to consider as well. After courting both Beijing and Taipei, the administration is now turning on China to appease American voters. Anticipating criticism that the U.S. economy is failing to produce manufacturing jobs, the White House is putting the blame on China's doorstep. China's refusal to float its currency rate came under sustained criticism from Treasury Secretary John Snow in fall 2003. Faced with a huge trade deficit with China, the Bush administration tried to push it to devalue its currency, which would make its exports more expensive compared with the U.S. competition. In December, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick joined the fray, accusing China of failing to open up its markets. The administration has slapped quotas on Chinese textiles and is gearing up for a battle on the Chinese government's support of its microchip industry. This China bashing, while mild compared to the saber rattling of Bush's early days in the White House, should come in



Where's the Love: Bush sided with China against Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian (center).

sent several signals to the DPP to hold off on the referendum, which Chen Shui-bian ignored. Then, in a December 9 meeting with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Bush sided with Beijing and the Taiwanese opposition by sternly warning Chen Shui-bian not to disrupt the status quo.

The resulting controversy has scrambled the ideological playing field and divided the China critics. On the one hand, the neoconservative think tank Project for the New American Century released a statement calling Bush's move "[a]ppeasement of a dictatorship." Arthur Waldron, a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, sees National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice colluding with foreign-policy mandarins like Brent Scowcroft and Henry Kissinger "to wean W. away from his

Mike Fonte, the DPP's Washington liaison. "But what seems from this side like pushing the envelope is seen from that side as deepening democracy."

More troubling is the charge that "democracy" conceals the DPP's ambition to formalize its independence, even if this leads to war with China and a U.S. intervention. "[T]hey want independence, and they don't have the muscle to defeat China," Minxin Pei of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace points out. "Taiwan's real goal is to drive the United States into fighting a war with China." And war, ultimately, will not strengthen the flowering of civil society and democratic expression that has taken place in Taiwan in the last decade. "Democracy has prospered in Taiwan because of the improved security stability climate in the region,"

handy in an election year.

The Chinese character for contradiction combines the ideograms for “sword” and “shield.” According to the story behind this juxtaposition, a merchant in a Chinese market offered the strongest possible sword in the world, capable of penetrating all shields. One shopper happened to walk around to the other side of the stall only to discover the same merchant selling a very different product: the strongest possible

shield in the world, capable of deflecting all possible swords. By seeking the best possible relations with both countries, while simultaneously putting at risk its own core values and constituencies, the Bush administration may soon discover its China policy collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions. ■

JOHN FEEFER is the author, most recently, of *North Korea, South Korea: U.S. Policy at a Time of Crisis*.

all but ensure that they get the sentence they seek by doing their sentencing guidelines “math” in advance of trial, even in advance of the indictment. And this new calculus isn’t sitting well with the judiciary.

As first reported in the *New York Law Journal*, a panel of federal judges on the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals last fall vented about this changing calculus during an oral argument in a drug case that began long before Feeney. “You’re telling me that the system we have set up, that has been set up by Congress, which removes discretion from the judges, has given discretion to your office,” Judge Guido Calabresi told U.S. Attorney Robert Appleton during a remarkable public exchange. “This case is a perfect example of you telling me that your office made some decisions with respect to what is right and just and true, and the district court is thereby prohibited from having any say in the matter.”

Another jurist, U.S. District Judge John Keenan, sitting in Manhattan, has repeatedly criticized the changes. “The Feeney Amendment has created unnecessary pressure on judges and unduly restricts them,” Keenan says. “The shift in sentencing authority [from judges] to prosecutors is what I primarily object to.” Things have reached the point that U.S. District Judges Paul Friedman and Thomas Penfield Jackson, who both sit as trial judges in Washington, no longer tell jurors in criminal cases that they, the judges, determine sentences—they explicitly tell jurors that they aren’t really responsible for the sentences imposed upon convicted defendants.

Not everyone perceives Feeney as an impermissible or unwise encroachment on the federal judiciary. Justice Department spokeswoman Monica Goodling says the amendments will halt a “consistent and unchecked increase in the number of cases” in which federal judges departed downward from sentencing guidelines. And House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner Jr. says the Feeney Amendment “re-establishes Congress’ original intent for fair and equal sentencing justice throughout the federal judiciary.”

The Umpires Strike Back

Incensed by a congressional act that shackles their sentencing discretion, federal judges—William Rehnquist included—are pounding the gavel.

BY ANDREW COHEN

IT TAKES A LOT TO RILE UP THE FEDERAL judiciary. By virtue of their training and temperament, judges don’t often whine, complain, or show anger in public. And they almost never air their grievances in the court of public opinion. So it is extraordinary to see some life-tenured jurists so upset these days about a new law they say intrudes on their constitutionally protected independence.

Last year, Congress piggybacked on to the Amber Alert bill a provision known as the Feeney Amendment. Named for Florida Republican Representative Tom Feeney, the rider was designed to limit the circumstances in which a federal judge could depart downward in a criminal sentence under the federal sentencing guidelines. Among other things, the Feeney Amendment directed the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the congressionally created independent agency that oversees the federal criminal-sentencing scheme, to change the rules to preclude judges from considering certain mitigating factors—like a defendant’s cooperation, even—that would support downward departures. The amendment limited the number of judges who could serve at any one time on the commission itself and created controversial new interbranch reporting requirements that some judges feel harken back to the days of blacklisting.

The Feeney provisions represent Congress’ latest effort to limit the already diminished discretion federal trial judges have in sentencing for criminal cases. Now the judiciary is pushing back. “Feeney makes judges go from being ‘the pinnacle’ of the plea-bargaining process to being merely ‘a nuisance,’” complains U.S. District Judge William Young, the chief federal trial judge in Massachusetts. He sees the amendment as further proof that Congress wants to vitiate the judiciary’s role in sentencing while maintaining the aura of judicial independence and power. “Congress doesn’t want to get rid of [the] symbolism [of judge-inspired sentences] because that conveys to our people that there has been judgment, that there has been reflection,” Young adds.

But it is precisely because Feeney takes away a judge’s right to reflect upon an individual’s life history prior to sentencing that some judges perceive it as an improper and unconstitutional violation of the separation-of-powers principle. Because Feeney narrows the time range judges may consider in sentencing, the provisions give prosecutors a concomitant power to affect those sentences simply by virtue of the charges they bring against a defendant. In other words, prosecutors can

Another thing many on the bench dislike about Feeney is the way it came about. The Judicial Conference of the United States, which shapes policies and procedures for the federal judiciary, wasn't consulted about the amendment before it was passed. This omission drew rare public comment from Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist. "It seems that the traditional interchange between the Congress and the judiciary broke down," the nation's top judge wrote in December 2003. The conference itself, made up of the nation's leading judges, including Rehnquist, issued a unanimous resolution in April 2003 calling for the amendment's repeal because of this lack of notice. And the members of the U.S. Sentencing Commission, who along with federal prosecutors are part of the executive branch, practically begged Congress last year to consult with them before enacting Feeney. Congress said thanks but no thanks and promptly passed Feeney, which President Bush signed into law.

Then there are Feeney's reporting requirements, which have generated a lot of heat from the bench and most of the light from the media. The legislation directs the chief judge of every federal district to send the sentencing documents on each criminal case to the U.S. Sentencing Commission. The commission then must, upon request, pass along this data to the Justice Department and to the judiciary committees in both chambers of Congress. The legislators cannot impeach a sitting federal judge except in extraordinary cases, but the oversight power alone—and the implicit political and legal threat it generates—has judges steamed.

The Justice Department claims these reporting requirements don't add measurably to those that already exist, but across the country judges seem to disagree. In mid-January, a federal judge in California became the first jurist to declare these requirements unconstitutional. "Congress may not intrude on the Judiciary any more than the Judiciary may intrude on Congress," wrote U.S. District Judge Dickran Tevzian in a case involving an accused bank robber who negotiated a plea deal with prosecutors. Another

federal jurist, U.S. District Judge Sterling Johnson Jr., who sits in Brooklyn, simply has sealed any sentencing support documents, like probation reports, that otherwise might have been turned over to the U.S. Sentencing Commission under Feeney. "There is a lot of sensitive information gathered in those [pre-sentencing] reports," Johnson says. "What good reason does the legislative branch have with confidential judicial records?"

Other judges are raising questions and taking action, too. Last June, U.S. District Judge John Martin Jr., a federal judge in Manhattan, gave up his lifetime appointment partially as a protest of the sentencing process. U.S. District Judge Thomas Platt, who sits as a trial

judge in Brooklyn, reportedly was removed from a drug case last year by a federal appellate panel because he had been so outspoken about his opposition to the sentencing guidelines. And even Rehnquist, who is always careful with his words, warned that the Feeney Amendment "could appear to be an unwarranted and ill-considered effort to intimidate individual judges in the performance of their judicial duties." Judge Young goes one step further than his boss. "I am not intimidated," he says. "But I am obedient." ■

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Rogue Whale

Seventy years after FDR, JP Morgan finally got its revenge against banking regulations with its Chase merger. But a new FDR is watching.

BY SAM NATAPOFF

THE WHITE WHALE OF AMERICAN FINANCE has returned. In January 2004, JP Morgan Chase & Co. acquired BankOne for \$58 billion. This merger is the latest reflection of a two-decade reversal in public policy, which invites enormous conflicts of interest within banks. It was this deregulation that led to scandals of insider trading and investor deception and deepened the 2000–01 stock-market collapse, repeating the sordid history that led to tougher bank regulation in the 1930s. This latest acquisition brings the House of Morgan full circle, reminiscent of its power in the 1920s.

Yet just as a financial Moby Dick is rising again, so, too, is a new Captain Ahab. Eliot Spitzer, New York's attorney general, is working to reform the culture of Wall Street, filling a vacuum left by a pliant Bush administration. But mergers like Morgan's make Spitzer's task more difficult, because they create multiple opportunities for conflicts of interest.

By undertaking the third-largest banking merger in American history,

Morgan becomes the second-largest U.S. bank in assets (\$1.1 trillion to Citigroup's nearly \$1.2 trillion) and deposits (\$490 billion to Bank of America's \$552 billion), with some 2,300 branches and 6,000 ATMs across 17 states. Post-merger, Morgan now issues the most Visas and MasterCards nationwide (some 95 million) and holds the largest share of U.S. credit-card balances—\$125.1 billion, or 18.9 percent of the market. (2003 was the first year credit cards were used more than cash or checks in stores.)

TO PRESERVE THEIR HISTORIC INFLUENCE, generations of Morgans have fought financial regulation. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, JP Morgan & Co. was the world's most powerful bank. It was America's unofficial central bank, served as international guardian of the gold standard, and halted periodic financial panics (from which it profited). According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the "money trust" famously described by Supreme

Court Justice Louis Brandeis as the greatest threat to the American economy was simply another name for J. Pierpont Morgan, the bank's eponymous founder.

Morgan exerted extraordinary government influence, particularly with the Republican Party. During the administrations of the 1920s, Morgan men routinely represented the U.S. government at international monetary meetings. President Herbert Hoover frequently phoned Morgan's CEO before breakfast. So many Morgan men, in fact, were on the U.S. delegation to the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference that some observers grumbled they were running the show. Benjamin Strong, governor of the New York Federal Reserve Bank from 1914-28 and America's most powerful central banker, began his career at a Morgan-associated bank and would likely have joined Morgan had the bank's partners not persuaded him to run N.Y. Fed instead. This Morgan-Fed connection continues today: Before President Reagan named him chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan served as a corporate director for Morgan.

Morgan was also the Roaring '20s emblem of securities abuse. The 1929 crash saw individual investors suffer as many banks, Morgan chief among them, favored their own stock offerings and profits over their investors' best interests. In May 1933, U.S. Senate Banking Committee counsel Ferdinand Pecora exposed how Morgan reserved shares at reduced prices for certain clients, giving guaranteed profits to former President Calvin Coolidge, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's sitting treasury secretary, the chairmen of the Republican and Democratic national committees, and the CEOs of General Electric, AT&T, and Standard Oil, among others. To curb these abuses, FDR signed the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act, which prohibited commercial banks from underwriting securities, and the next year signed the Securities Exchange Act, which created the Securities and Exchange Commission to police Wall Street and prevent stock manipulation.

SINCE THE 1980S, HOWEVER, FINANCIAL lobbies have done end runs around

banking and securities regulation. In 1990, Morgan became the first bank to receive Federal Reserve permission to underwrite securities, provided that they remain only 10 percent of its business. In 1996, the Federal Reserve reinterpreted Glass-Steagall, raising the securities limit to 25 percent of revenues.

Regulators also indulged megamergers of banks with investment banks and insurance companies, and one another, including Morgan's merger with Chase Manhattan, Citigroup's 1998 \$72.6 billion merger with Travelers, and BankAmerica's 1998 \$61.6 billion merger with NationsBank. And in 1999, the process begun by the Federal Reserve was completed when President Clinton and a Republican Congress repealed Glass-Steagall entirely.

U.S. financiers account for one-third of the 32 Bush re-election "Pioneers" and "Rangers." High finance gives 61 percent of its political donations to the GOP.

Not surprisingly, as regulation has been breached, abuses like those of the 1920s have recurred. At the same time, finance's political influence in the GOP has grown. The nonpartisan, nonprofit Texans for Public Justice reports that U.S. financiers account for one-third of the 32 new Bush re-election "Pioneers" and "Rangers" (those who raised \$100,000 and \$200,000, respectively) since 2000; a former Morgan regional chair and a Morgan consultant were major Bush fund-raisers in 2000, with the latter achieving Ranger status in 2004. More generally, the financial, insurance, and real-estate sectors favor Republicans, splitting their 2004 political contributions 61 percent to Republicans to 38 percent to Democrats.

MOBY DICK REQUIRES A NEMESIS. FOR Morgan, Ahab has often been governor of New York, has often become president, and has twice been named Roosevelt. The historic battle began in 1901, between J. Pierpont Morgan and Theodore Roosevelt, who was governor of New York before becoming president. Roosevelt harpooned Morgan

early, prosecuting Morgan's Northern Securities Company for antitrust violations and forcing it to break up in 1904. Morgan hated Roosevelt so much that the mere mention of the latter's name made the banker explode, "God damn all Roosevelts!"

Ironically, Morgan was responsible for educating the next Ahab. Morgan helped purchase land near Boston for the prep school Groton, where FDR first studied his cousin Teddy's exploits. As president, FDR specifically targeted Morgan via the Glass-Steagall Act. J.P. Morgan Jr. reportedly so loathed FDR that his grandchildren were told not to mention the president in his presence and Morgan's servants removed photos of FDR from the morning paper.

JP Morgan Chase's newest Ahab, Eliot Spitzer, is said to have his eye

firmly on the New York governor's mansion. Echoing the Rooseveltian view that finance must be controlled rather than liberated, Spitzer has forced Morgan and other top New York banks to pay huge fines for their abuse of the financial markets, including a \$1.4 billion collective settlement for Wall Street's 10 largest firms. As a result of Spitzer's relentless investigations, Morgan has surrendered numerous settlements, including \$135 million for assisting Enron, \$80 million for biased stock research, and \$25 million for offering insiders improper access to initial public stock offerings.

Morgan has always flourished when allowed free rein, and its recent merger has given it concentrated power reminiscent of its founder. But a new Ahab is on the hunt. ■

SAM NATAPOFF, *who worked in the Clinton administration, has worked at the European Central Bank, the German Bundesbank, and the European Parliament. He is writing a book about the politics of exchange-rate policy and lives in New York City.*

Judicial Overreach

BY PAUL STARR

It's not clear who should have been celebrating when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled in February that the state has to provide gay couples the right to marry and nothing less. The decision barred the Massachusetts legislature from

adopting a law authorizing "civil unions" in which "spouses" would have "all the same benefits, protections, rights and responsibilities under law as are granted to spouses in a marriage." Not enough, the judges declared, guaranteeing that Massachusetts legislators would put before the state's voters a constitutional amendment reversing the court's decision and galvanizing conservatives across the country to add a ban on gay marriage to the federal constitution.

Meanwhile, New Jersey enacted a law allowing same-sex (and other) couples to enter into "domestic partnerships" that carry most of the rights of a marriage. The statute isn't actually as broad as the Massachusetts legislation would have been. But it passed with little opposition, nobody is threatening to overturn it, and it represents a great advance for equal rights. Nothing prevents these provisions for gay couples from being expanded, perhaps eventually extending to same-sex marriage—that is, as long as no amendment to the contrary gets adopted nationally.

American attitudes toward same-sex relationships have undergone a transformation in the past decade. Surveys, however, still show substantial majorities opposed to gay marriage, with the public closely divided over civil unions that would equalize rights to pensions, hospitalize visitations, and other benefits. Changing the terms from "marriage" to "civil unions" is more than a cosmetic touch; it shifts public discussion from a vocabulary of faith to a vocabulary of fairness. By ruling out civil unions, the Massachusetts judges prevented defenders of equal legal rights for gays from framing the issue in terms that maximize their chances of majority support.

The reaction to the Massachusetts decision illustrates the risks of turning to the courts to leapfrog public opinion in a democracy. Even though courts may be called "supreme," the people can overrule them, and on same-sex marriage they already have. After supreme courts in Alaska and Hawaii approved gay marriage, constitutional amendments in those states overturned their decisions. In contrast, Vermont's highest court gave the legislature the option of authorizing civil unions, and that legislation seems likely to survive.

What was wrong with the Massachusetts decision, however, was not simply that it was blind to the likely political reaction. It was also unpersuasive. In its February ruling, the court determined that civil unions would carry a stigma of inferiority—a judgment about their symbolic meaning—without any evidence about how civil unions would have developed in practice. States create legal rights and obligations, but their administrative categories do not necessarily limit social understandings. People create their own symbolism through ceremonies such as weddings and other practices, and nothing in the law authorizing civil unions would have prevented gays from investing the unions with all the symbolism of a marriage.

The Massachusetts judges and religious conservatives are joined in a kind of antagonistic cooperation. They agree that constitutional law ought to settle the question of same-sex marriage and are forcing Americans to deal with the issue in those terms. But the case for leaving controversies to politics and legislation, rather than fixing them in constitutional principle, is especially strong where public sentiment is fluid and highly charged. Legislation allows for negotiation among elected representatives; a legislative compromise may be incremental, the losing side is more likely to accept the outcome, and the result may be both more stable and legitimate in the eyes of the public. The wide acceptance of New Jersey's domestic-partnership law exemplifies these advantages.

When reformers get into the habit of relying on lawyers and judges, they not only risk a self-defeating political reaction but may also lose the facility for building a majoritarian politics. That is surely one of the things that went wrong with American liberalism in the mid-20th century, and it would be a disaster to repeat that mistake. The Massachusetts court decision couldn't have come at a worse time, reinforcing the president's argument for conservative judges and handing Republicans an election issue. If an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to ban gay marriage succeeds, the Massachusetts decision will go down as one of the great examples of judicial overreach in our history. ■

**The Massachusetts
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Joker in Chief

BY ROBERT S. MCINTYRE

As federal deficits mount to record levels, President Bush now tells us there's light at the end of the tunnel. Not a bright light, mind you, but he does claim that his new budget plan, despite more huge tax cuts, will get the government's books halfway

to balanced within five years. There are, however, a few major ifs: If you don't count spending for Iraq and Afghanistan. If you ignore the promised but unbudgeted fix for the alternative minimum tax (hugely expensive). If you expect Congress to slash domestic appropriations by about a quarter in real terms. And, apparently, if you assume that by 2009 we'll still be in Bush's "trifecta" (crappy economy, national emergency, war), so he's entitled to keep spending all the Social Security surplus.

This year, Bush says the federal government, outside of Social Security, will spend \$1,939 billion but raise only \$1,264 billion in revenues, for a deficit of \$675 billion. More than a third of regular budget outlays will be financed with borrowed money.

Bush's assertion that he'll cut the deficit in half by 2009 includes the following explicit assumptions: Spending on defense and homeland security will fall by 14 percent as a share of the economy by 2009. Total domestic appropriations will plummet by 24 percent, with huge cuts in science (minus 19 percent), pollution control (minus 27 percent), transportation (minus 18 percent), disaster relief (minus 49 percent), education (minus 22 percent), housing assistance (minus 33 percent), and law enforcement (minus 20 percent). The alternative minimum tax will be fixed, but at no cost—rather than the \$65 billion that even a modest correction would cost in 2009 alone, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO).

Even with all these ridiculous assumptions, Bush's projected regular budget deficit for 2009 remains at \$501 billion. He offsets that against the \$263 billion he projects as Social Security's surplus that year. Voila! A "unified deficit" of a mere \$237 billion.

Asked at a February press briefing if some of these premises aren't a bit questionable, Bush's budget director, Josh Bolten, feigned befuddlement. "The question confuses me," Bolten told reporters. "The budget we're presenting today is one that is, from my perspective, completely honest."

In reality, the budget outlook under Bush's policies is grim and getting grimmer. Under more reasonable assumptions, the CBO's annual budget report this January shows that Bush's

policies are likely to entail more than \$10 trillion in deficit spending outside of Social Security through 2014.

The president likes to blame our budget problems on the high costs of war and terrorism. But suppose that defense and domestic appropriations keep up with the economy after 2004 and that all of Bush's tax cuts are extended. Under this plausible scenario, CBO figures indicate that only a

fifth of the huge deficits we face stem from higher spending on defense and homeland security compared with their Clinton levels. Only 8 percent reflect higher domestic appropriations. In contrast, more than half of the projected deficits are due to Bush's tax cuts.

Well, we can't expect the president to reconsider his tax program. As he told Tim Russert on *Meet the Press*, "I'm not going to change, see? I'm not trying to accommodate—I won't change my philosophy or my point of view."

But what about those mythic Republicans who supposedly worry about deficit spending?

A vanishing, if not vanished, breed, apparently—at least in Washington. To be sure, some on the far right have begun to feign concern over our mounting deficits. Several influential conservative groups recently condemned Bush for backing a "drunken sailor budget." But there was no admission that Bush's tax cuts have any role in our fiscal mess.

Harking back to the day when millers were named Miller and clerks Clark, Representative Jeff Flake of Arizona, one of the House's raging "movement conservatives," told *The Washington Post* that he and his allies will call for cutting outlays by one-tenth of 1 percent in fiscal 2005. "It sends the signal we're now serious about this deficit," Flake said.

So there you have it: As our country's finances go down the toilet, our president and his allies propose trivial or sham spending cuts and a perpetual raid on the Social Security trust fund—and still can't get anywhere near fiscal balance because of reckless tax cutting. Could this be the year that the public starts to see through their dangerous baloney? ■

ROBERT S. MCINTYRE is the director of Citizens for Tax Justice.



Wake-Up Time

Yes, Bush has bullied the national media. But are they really powerless? Only if they play along. Herewith, five suggestions for how the Fourth Estate can stop the charade.

BY ERIC ALTERMAN AND MICHAEL TOMASKY

ARE OUR NATIONAL MEDIA—SCHOOLYARD SILLY DURING campaign 2000, by turns somnolent and sycophantic ever since—starting to rouse themselves from their long torpor? It's still way too early to answer that question with a "yes," but if that's what the answer turns out to be, the first week of February may have marked a turning point.

In that week, the media started raising new questions about the justification for the Iraq War; broke an important story about the administration knowing last fall that the Medicare bill would cost \$134 billion more than it let on to its employers (the public); broke another about a probe of alleged bribes at Dick Cheney's Halliburton; and finally, led by *The Boston Globe's* Walter Robinson, started to take a semi-meaningful look into George W. Bush's disputed National Guard record.

Don't start dancing to the music just yet, though. Bad habits die hard, and we've all come to expect too little genuine journalism and far too much of what might be called "journalism-related program activity." This is what we got back in 2000, when Al Gore was deemed a lying SOB for statements he made that were wholly accurate. (Gore *did* play a large role in creating the predecessor to the Internet, he *did* hold the hearings that "discovered" contamination at Love Canal, and his only mistake regarding that most crucial of "lies" about who inspired the characters in Erich Segal's *Love Story* was *accurately* recalling a decades-old mistaken story in *The Tennessean*.) Remember, he was running against a guy who couldn't remember a year of his military service or anything connected with a million-dollar bailout he received regarding a fishy stock sale during which he was privy to inside information about the same stock's likely collapse. But hardly anyone thought those questions worth examining.

That was campaign 2000: almost no investigation of Bush's past and aggressive misrepresentation in his favor when the stories finally did come up. Karl Rove couldn't have asked for anything more.

We understand: It's tough out there. Campaign reporters have grueling jobs and can't always be expected to produce big-picture journalism. In the Bush White House, meanwhile, journalists have been forced to do their jobs under profoundly onerous conditions. In his much-discussed January 19 *New Yorker* article, Ken Auletta detailed the multiple ways in which the Bush administration has successfully shackled

reporters. Among the straitjacket techniques detailed there and elsewhere: limited (or no) access, interviews granted on restrictive terms, rare presidential press conferences, and substance-less "availabilities" in which reporters get to ask Bush two or three questions, which they have been told had best relate to the topic Bush wants to discuss. The reporters described by Auletta's diligent reporting seem to believe themselves all but powerless to resist.

Come now. This isn't Pacifica Radio we're discussing here. These are the largest, richest, most powerful media corporations in the world, billion-dollar babies with plenty of resources at their disposal. What's one presidential administration to them? In time, Bush will be back in Crawford swatting Titleists. The Sulzbergers and the Grahams, to say nothing of General Electric and AOL Time Warner, will never be removed from office. That their journalists in Washington—with a small but still significant number of admirable exceptions—have quietly caved in to these conditions may or may not be unethical, but it is disgraceful. That the owners have let it happen will be their shameful legacy.

The fat lady has not yet completed her aria, however. The Democrats have stiffened their spines, and Bush's problems have grown unignorable. Election 2004 offers ample opportunity for the ambitious men and women of the Fourth Estate to reassert their power and professional pride. It is in that hope and spirit that we offer the following suggestions for reporters and editors this time around:

1. Go beyond the "he said, she said" and tell us what you believe to be true and important about a story. The chief convention of most news reporting—this side says this, that side says that—needs a drastic rethink. In the age of spin, an age brought to new lows by this White House, a formula that requires giving equal weight to both sides ends up helping the side that's lying. So when Bush says, as he often did during the last campaign, "[B]y far, the vast majority of my tax cuts go to those at the bottom end of the spectrum," this obvious and factually checkable lie got the same play in most stories as the truth did. The he said, she said convention actually blurred the truth.

This reflex was at work in the major papers' coverage of Bush's February 7 *Meet the Press* interview. Some of the news stories were skeptical, especially Dana Milbank's in *The Washington Post*. Even so, Bush plainly made several claims

that simply were not true. Reporters were aware of this, having received a well-documented fact-check from the Center for American Progress within hours of the interview's broadcast. Still, many allowed Bush to continue to attempt to justify the war on grounds that had already been discredited.

We've entered an age in which instantaneous Web analyses are quickly getting readers accustomed to ways of taking in news that are more frank and opinionated. Editors need to reconsider these conventions and reinvigorate them so that they are less concerned with giving equal weight to each side and more concerned with pursuing the factual truth (and yes, this should apply to lying Democrats as well). Truth is sometimes elusive and hard to pin down. It is, however, the point.

2. Challenge the master narrative with genuine investigative reporting. Do you have a good idea of how presidential sibling Neil Bush makes his money these days? Can you describe even briefly what Interior Secretary Gale Norton has been up to for the last three years? Can you name three (or even one) of Bush's top 10 corporate contributors? Do you know anything about The Carlyle Group beyond the fact that the president's father is affiliated with it?

If the media were working properly, you'd be able to answer at least a couple of those questions. But unless you're among America's most ferocious newshounds, you can't. And the reason you can't is that investigative reporting has all but disappeared in Washington.

We're aware of the many reasons for this problem: reduced newsroom budgets, Bush administration intimidation, and more. But the primary culprit is the tyranny of an instant news cycle coupled with the power of the master narrative. The cable shows, the Sunday shows, the major news weeklies, and, to a lesser extent, the leading editorial and op-ed pages—with the hard-right radio world providing the background white noise—establish a story line: Bill Clinton is Slick Willie, George W. Bush is Winston Churchill. All Democrats are sissies unless proven otherwise. In the land of the 24-hour news-cycle, the narrative, which gets repeated over and over until it takes on the veneer of being true even when it's nonsensical, is king.

With the glorious exception of the indomitable Seymour Hersh (and damn few others), the Washington media have given this administration an almost total pass. Even the one criminal probe into the administration, the Valerie Plame-leak investigation, was itself leaked to *The Washington Post* by a disgruntled administration official and only became a full-blown story after the Department of Justice announced its investigation.

Speaking at Harvard University last spring, *Washington Post* Executive Editor Len Downie said the following: "So if you do tough investigative reporting about Democrats or about issues that are important to the left, you'll get a strong backlash from the left. Similarly, if you do tough investiga-

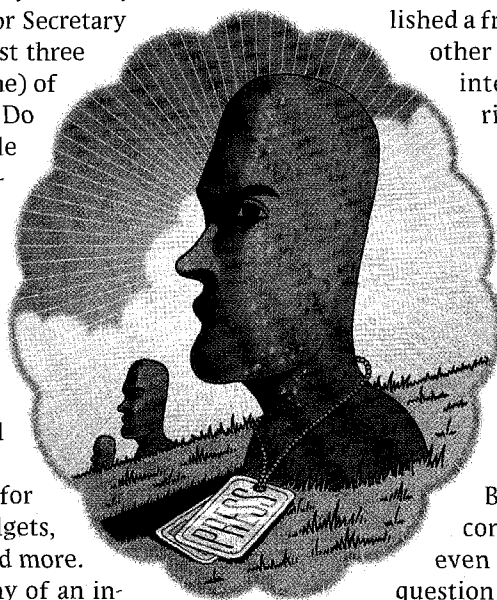
tive reporting of the Republicans or people on the right, you'll get a strong backlash from them. And I think this is also having an impact on the media. It's scaring people."

There you have it. The top editor at America's second most-important newspaper admits that angry phone calls and e-mails are frightening editors (it's a good thing there was no Internet when Ben Bradlee was editor, we guess). And in a bit of painful poetic justice, the paper's most famous and once-great investigative reporter, Bob Woodward, has reverted to the role of court stenographer; channeling the majesty, greatness, and unwavering resolve of Bush, Cheney, and company in exchange for unrestricted access to national-security meetings and documents that are routinely denied to more critically minded reporters.

3. Show proportionality in covering controversies. In the runup to John Kerry's February 3 victories in five states, *The New York Times*' Glen Justice and John Tierney published a front-page article examining Kerry's and other Democrats' contributions from special interests. Fair enough: The public has a right to know. But it also has a right to knowledge that's placed in some sort of sensible context. Take a look at this sentence, for instance: "Mr. Kerry denounces President Bush for catering to the rich, but he has depended more heavily on affluent donors than the other leading Democrats except for another populist, Senator John Edwards." Just how does Kerry's standing vis-à-vis the *other Democrats* provide a useful measure of whether Bush caters to the rich? And do Kerry's contributions from special interests come even close to those of the president? This question is not explored with reporting. Instead, the authors tell us, using the paradigmatic "to be sure" construction, "To be sure, none of the Democrats have collected donations on the scale of President Bush's campaign, and they generally avoid donations from political action committees. But the Democrats are hardly naifs when it comes to enlisting support from special interests in Washington and elsewhere, from corporate leaders and from unions in the public and private sectors."

Talk about your false constructions. Did anyone accuse the Democrats of being "naifs when it comes to enlisting support from special interests in Washington and elsewhere, from corporate leaders and from unions in the public and private sectors"? A single sentence of context—provided with no numbers whatever—hardly gives readers a fair sense of who's giving what to whom. Rather, it plays perfectly into the Rove game plan of selling the country to special interests while proclaiming it to be in the public good. It would have taken Justice and Tierney about 90 seconds to go to a Web site every political journalist knows and discover that in fact, Bush has received 28 times more money in PAC donations than Kerry has.

4. A little solidarity on behalf of the truth, please. ABC Political Director Mark Halperin began a campaign awhile



back for reporters to break former Bush press secretary Ari Fleischer of his habit of ignoring questions he didn't like by calling on another reporter who would conveniently change the subject. Great idea, but it went nowhere. The apogee of a servile media was reached on television a year ago when reporters sat still for a perfectly scripted imitation of a prime-time press conference that had fewer surprises in it than the umpteenth viewing of an old *I Love Lucy* episode. There's really nothing that should prevent political reporters from agreeing not to ask a new question until their colleague gets a satisfactory answer to his or hers. In the long run, such a rule (which should of course be applied to Democrats, too) would help everyone.

But it isn't just reporters who should show solidarity. The news organizations they work for need to do the same. Last year, Jonathan Weisman, an economics reporter at *The Washington Post*, published a letter detailing the terms laid down by the White House that he would have to accept to get an interview with an administration official for a story about outgoing economic adviser R. Glenn Hubbard: The interview would be off the record only, quotes Weisman wanted to use would have to be e-mailed to the press office in advance of publication, and, if approved, the quotes could be attributed to "a White House official." Weisman went on to note that even after he met all these conditions, the official he was quoting demanded that the quote be changed—that words never spoken be placed within quotation marks. When Weisman met this demand only halfway and the story appeared, he was met with "an angry denunciation by the White House press official," telling him that he had broken his word and "violated journalistic ethics." As Weisman acknowledged, he had violated ethics—by agreeing to all this nonsense in the first place.

The blame here rests not with Weisman, who was brave enough to publicize these details, but with his employer. Why should the big, powerful *Washington Post* bow to terms like these? On a regular basis, our greatest media institutions are accepting conditions that every undergraduate journalism student in the country is taught to reject. Individual reporters, scrambling for access and scoops, can't change this on their own. It's up to their bosses and owners.

5. Don't let non-news organs drive the news cycle. This may be the most important point, and you need only think back to the last election to see how it might work this time. Some right-wing radio host or FOX will push some tale about the Democratic nominee. It will either be an outright deception (Gore and Love Canal), a perverse distortion of something that contains a small kernel of truth (Gore and the famous "standing student" in Sarasota, Florida), or something completely irrelevant to the man's qualifications to run the country (Gore and fully buttoned brown suits). It will be framed as reflecting the nominee's "character." And many voters, who pay only moderate attention to the news and don't give any thought to how and why the information in front of them gets there, will buy into it.

Every serious journalist will know, deep down, that it's

exaggerated, unfair, and orchestrated. But it won't matter. It will travel from the right-wing media to the cable shows (if, indeed, that can be called "traveling" at all) and then land on the network news shows and the front pages and op-ed pages of the respectable newspapers.

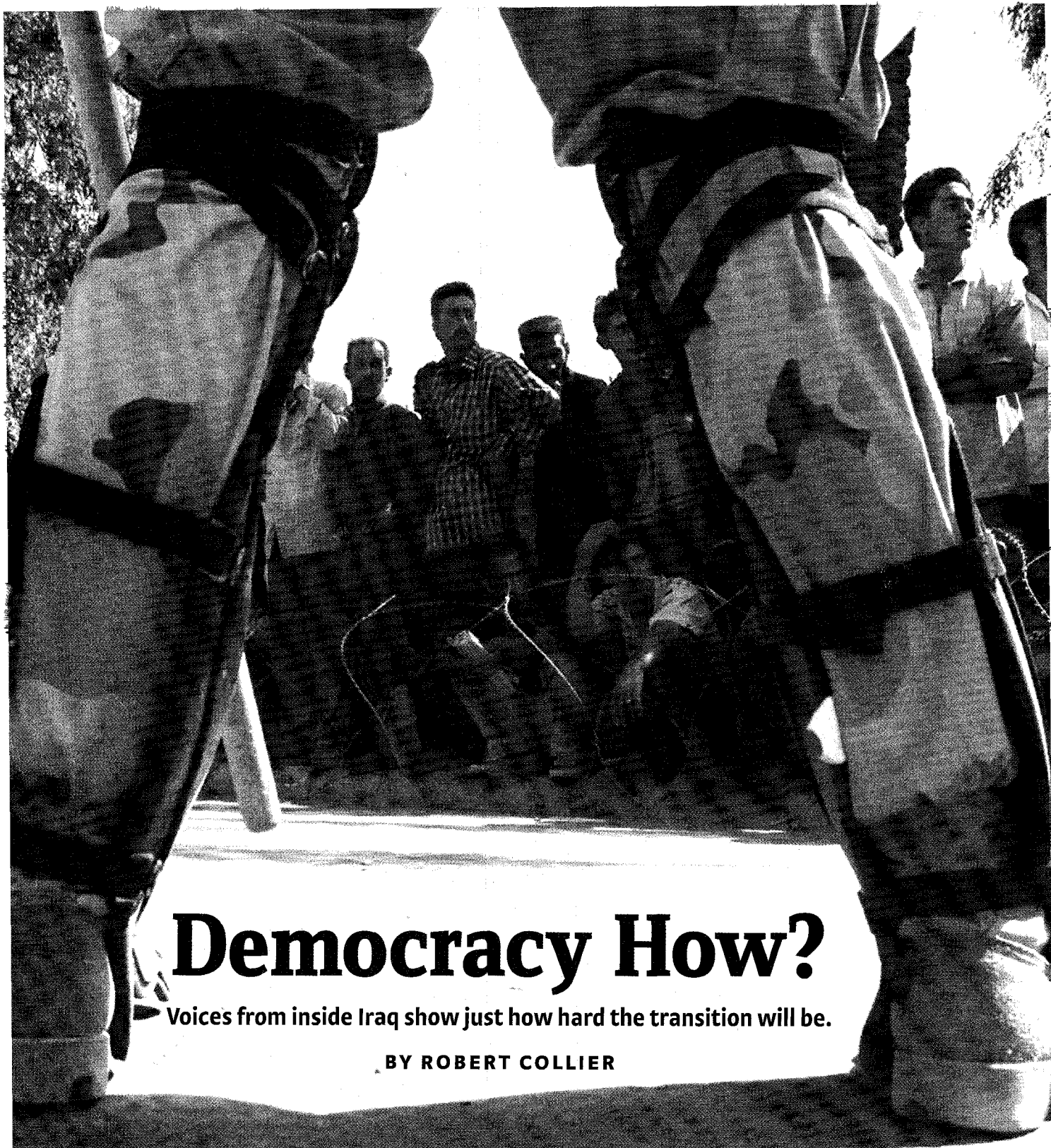
A lot of things get "reported" on shows like *Hardball with Chris Matthews* and *The O'Reilly Factor*, and by people like Matt Drudge and Rush Limbaugh, that are, to be more than generous, not exactly nailed down. The fact that they are "out there," as an MSNBC producer once said about the report that a witness had caught Clinton and Monica Lewinsky in the act inside the White House, is not a reason for journalists to put their own names and that of their news organizations behind them. Journalists need to ask themselves not only whether a story is true but whether it's significant. Is it somehow more important that John Kerry may have gotten a Botox shot when the nation's deficit is shooting out of control and Iraq is proving not only unmanageable but turns out to have never been threatening?

The high-minded dodge for tabloid reporting of this type can be found in claims like that of Mickey Kaus: "[T]he Kerry Botox story is not a frivolous bit of gossip but a perfectly legitimate synecdoche for this type of Kerry behavior." Well, anything can be declared a "perfectly legitimate synecdoche" for any type of behavior by that standard. Botox or no Botox—and we don't have a position on this—has nothing whatever to do with carrying out the duties of the presidency. Save that crap for those who at least admit to being entertainers first and journalists second (if at all).

JOURNALISTS ARE SUPPOSED TO ENJOY THEIR WORK AND take pride in it. Otherwise, why bother? We are not typically overpaid or commanding of the respect in society that doctors or successful businesspeople enjoy. The profession experienced an all-too-brief injection of self-worth in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. "When you find yourself covering sex and sleaze stories, you're not terribly proud of it," explained Clarence Page, a *Chicago Tribune* columnist. "It wasn't the kind of thing I could go home and talk to my kid about. Now my son comes to me with questions about Afghanistan. I feel proud of what I do ..."

If journalists demonstrated the kind of tenacity in going after key political stories that they did during that brief shining moment, well, America will have an election worthy of the world's oldest democracy, and reporters and editors alike will be able to speak proudly of the charge given to them by its oldest written constitution: to protect and defend the public's right to know its leaders—and to choose them wisely. ■

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Democracy How?

Voices from inside Iraq show just how hard the transition will be.

BY ROBERT COLLIER

IT WAS A RUN-OF-THE-MILL WEEKDAY IN SAMARRA, Iraq, a large town in the heart of the Sunni Triangle. Guerrilla land mines had exploded that morning in several locations, leaving no U.S. casualties but several Iraqis killed by the American soldiers' return fire. The Americans said the dead Iraqis were guerrillas, townspeople said they were innocent bystanders, and the truth of the matter was hard to find.

In front of the blue-and-white tiled walls of the Imam al-Hadi shrine, crowds of pilgrims and townspeople stepped around the charred and bullet-riddled skeletons of cars that had been caught in crossfire. Across the street, at the entrance to the clothing *souq*, or marketplace, 30 or so men clustered around me, yelling and denouncing the American occupation as I relayed questions through my translator.

Suddenly the crowd parted and a middle-aged, powerfully

built man came to the front, wearing the olive-green uniform and officer's winter jacket of the Saddam Hussein-era Iraqi army—garb that probably would earn him immediate arrest if he were encountered by U.S. troops. The crowd hushed as he spun into a rant about America and Zionism, sounding very much like Baathist government officials in prewar Iraq. Finally, he paused for breath, and I asked the question that I had come to Iraq to ask: What would bring peace to Iraq?

"Elections," he said, to my surprise. "But real elections, not those that the Americans are planning. And the Americans must withdraw from our cities and not interfere with them."

His demands were eerily similar to those of Iraq's Shiite Muslim leaders, archenemies of the Baathists who have led huge street demonstrations denouncing the Americans and calling for elections. It may seem contradictory for these two groups, whose historical attachment to democracy could be charitably described as nil, to be preaching electoral principles to the U.S. government. But among a fast-growing swath of the Iraqi population, "Democracy now!" has become the rallying cry. This pressure for elections has conjured up a nightmare scenario for the White House: the chance of a major delay in plans to carefully stage-manage the transfer of nominal sovereignty to a transitional government by July 1. Islamists, Baathists, and others on Washington's blacklist are predicting the new government will be a mirror image of the Iraqi Governing Council, whose 25 members were handpicked by U.S. administrator Paul Bremer and are viewed by many Iraqis as ineffective American stooges.

In a sign of his disdain for the Bush administration, Iraq's Shiite leader, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has refused to meet with Bremer despite frequent entreaties from the administrator's aides. Under the worst-case scenario, the ayatollah could follow through on his threats to declare the new government illegitimate, a step that could cause his followers to rise up in arms in tandem with the current, Sunni-dominated guerrilla insurgency.

"We are worried that Americans want to control the process and the result and produce another government of puppets like the one we have now," said Sheikh Abdel Hadi al-Daraji, the leader of the al-Zahraa mosque in Sadr City and a top aide to Muqtada al-Sadr, a firebrand rival of al-Sistani's.

But there's a kind of realpolitik calculation about it all: Shiites calculating that they can win national power and Baathists calculating that they can finally secure their "get out of jail" cards. In Samarra, my uniformed Baathist seemed to want to join the system as well as to fight it. "If the Americans insist that we cannot have the Baath Party anymore with [Hussein] at its head, OK," said the man, as the others listened respectfully. "If they say we should name it some other name, fine. If they say some of our other commanders are prohibited, OK. But we need leaders, and they have taken everyone,"—a reference to the more than 11,000 people being held in U.S. prison camps on suspicion of Baath Party membership or involvement in the guerrilla resistance,

and the many other Baathists who are in hiding from the U.S. dragnet. "Allow us a party, a building, a newspaper," he added, his voice turning suddenly soft and wheedling. "Allow us to run in elections. Give us something."

After a year of relentlessly seeking to marginalize the United Nations, George W. Bush is now begging the world body for a rescue. UN officials are fanning out across Iraq to try to negotiate an alternative plan for choosing a new government. When asked if he trusts the United Nations more than the United States, the Baathist raised his eyebrows and looked around the crowd, which listened and nodded. "Maybe yes, maybe no," he said. "Who is the United Nations? Whose orders are they obeying? We don't know."

For UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the dilemma is huge. He is under heavy pressure from the Bush administration to take an active role in brokering a solution in Iraq, yet he is also facing a simmering rebellion from his own staffers and top advisers. The truck bombing of the UN's Baghdad headquarters last August, which killed 22 people, including mission leader Sergio Vieira de Mello, is often referred to by UN staffers as "our 9-11." Many UN officials privately say the attack might not have occurred if Vieira de Mello had not taken a high-visibility role rallying support for the creation of the Governing Council. "We can't be seen as simply an extension of the Bush administration," said one top aide to Annan at UN headquarters who requested anonymity. "We made that mistake last year and we paid dearly for it."

Now, with UN officials returning to an Iraq protected by U.S. soldiers, they are likely to be seen again as Washington's proxy. "When the United Nations goes back into Iraq, it has got to get there with two things," said Lakhdar Brahimi, Annan's newly appointed special adviser on conflict prevention, in late January on the eve of the mission's departure for Iraq. "One, a clear identity of its own, and two, to go there with only the agenda of the United Nations, which is ... helping the people of Iraq out of their plight. Otherwise it will be of no use to anybody."

But if the Bush administration's policies are failing, it's also unclear whether the Democrats' alternative would succeed. The presidential candidates' plans vary: John Kerry, Howard Dean, and John Edwards advocate a UN takeover of the political side of the occupation and an introduction of foreign soldiers alongside U.S. troops; while Wesley Clark opposes a UN takeover but proposes a new international authority to take political control of Iraq while NATO takes military control. Similar plans have been offered by congressional Democrats such as Senators Ted Kennedy and Hillary Clinton.

All the American proposals—from Bush and the Democrats alike—share a catch-22: Pacifying Iraq will require broadened international participation and elections, but both of these require a less violent Iraq to be effective. No one has devised a way to defuse the insurgency other than the Bush administration's policy of trying to inflict total military defeat. Instead, all sides seem to have implicitly accepted the administration's strategy of excluding ex-

**UN staffers refer to
last August's truck
bombing that killed
Vieira de Mello and 21
others as "our 9-11."**

Baathists, radical Sunnis, and radical Shiites from Iraq's power structure—a policy that seems likely to prolong the armed resistance rather than shorten it.

During a reporting trip to Iraq in December, I interviewed dozens of Shiite leaders, Sunni clerics, and Baathists of all levels in Baghdad and the nearby cities of Falluja, Samarra, and Sadr City. I asked them two simple questions: What would stop the rebellion? And what would persuade them and the guerrillas to give some breathing space to a new foreign coalition? The answers revealed some sharp differences among the groups, but also important points in common. Together, these commonalities suggest a transition plan that could stop most of the guerrilla attacks, allow the introduction of UN civilian and military forces, and facilitate the withdrawal of large numbers of American troops.

Hold full national elections in the second half of 2004 under UN supervision. Elections are opposed by most members of the Iraqi Governing Council, which is not surprising considering that most of the 25 members have no organized support base in Iraq and are totally dependent on American tutelage. If elections are reasonably free and fair, many members and their fledgling parties might be wiped off Iraq's political map.

For months U.S. officials and some Governing Council members have insisted that elections could not be organized in less than two years because there is no reliable census data to create an electoral database. However, this objection has crumbled under attack from many experts. Current Iraqi government officials and UN officials agree that it would be easy to create an electoral roll with the existing database of the food-ration system, which distributes monthly provisions to every Iraqi family.

"The database is comprehensive, extremely detailed, and at least 97 percent accurate, with every safeguard possible to cross-check the records," said Ahmed al-Mukhtar, a Trade Ministry official who is overall director of the ration system. "If you gave me one month and enough paper, I could open registration to anyone who was exiled, allow them to register, and then I would give you a complete electoral roll." Even British occupation officials in southern Iraq have reportedly endorsed this proposal.

In New York, Carina Perelli, director of the UN Electoral Assistance Division, said before her recent return to Iraq that a full elections process could probably be mounted in about six months—a longer period than is expected by al-Sistani but much shorter than the one predicted by the Americans and their Iraqi allies. "If we are given enough resources and if there is consensus among all sectors of society, we can do it just like we've done it in dozens of other countries," she said. "But those are two big 'ifs.'"

Abandon any open attempts to stack the new government with pro-Western moderates. Even some of the people picked by the United States admit the modus operandi is unfair. "Nobody in this town respects the council, because we

were handpicked by the Americans," said Burkan Khalid, a civil engineer who serves on the 22-member city council in Samarra. He had happened across the crowd that surrounded me, and he piped up from the back when the uniformed Baathist finally finished speaking. "We are despised, and the next council chosen by the Americans and their puppets also will be despised," Khalid said. He shook his head and smiled, seeming resigned to his fate.

It's a bitter pill for the Bush administration to swallow, but democracy means that the bad guys should have a fair chance at winning. Because Shiites comprise more than 60 percent of Iraq's population, it's likely that elections could be won by two pro-Iranian Shiite groups, the Islamic Dawa Party or the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Over the past year, these groups' leaders have acted with unexpected moderation as members of the Governing Council. But if the United States continues maneuvering to block them from power, it may push al-Sistani and his followers—many of whom are more radical than Islamic Dawa or the Supreme Council—into rebellion.

Allow Baathists to purge their ranks and create a new party. In recent weeks, as the elections-are-impossible argument has weakened, U.S. officials have come up with a new objection: Because of the guerrilla attacks, they claim, the security situation is too unstable to hold elections.

But this excuse, while partially valid, has a solution: re-enfranchisement of the disenfranchised. Most Baathists and Sunni radicals support elections only on the condition that they be granted some form of political rehabilitation. They say they have been virtually disenfranchised

by the anti-Baathist purges and counterinsurgency sweeps that have banned tens of thousands of ex-Baathists from government employment and have created huge, Guantanamo-style prison camps holding more than 11,000 Iraqis.

"We will support elections only if we can participate," said a former brigadier general in the Iraqi army who commanded troops on the Baghdad outskirts during last year's war. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the general made clear his sympathy with the guerrillas yet declined to say whether he has any relation to them. Like thousands of other ex-Baathists, the general is in hiding, moving from house to house to evade the U.S. dragnet. He spoke with me at a middle-class Baghdad restaurant, and with his neatly pressed shirt and slacks he looked like any other businessman. He added that he is not on any U.S. most-wanted list as far as he knows, "But they can take you any time, and they can do whatever they want with you."

If Baathists are not rehabilitated, he said, the attacks on Americans will continue. "If we are allowed to choose, and if the United Nations is there to make sure we are not cheated, we will give the new government a chance," he said. "But if there are no real elections, the resistance will be much greater than it is now."



Pray Tell: Is democratic self-rule in Iraq possible?

Postwar rehabilitation has worked elsewhere. In Central America, Angola, Mozambique, and the Balkans, the defeated side was given a fair chance to vie for power in a democratic system, and this inclusiveness was a crucial element in cementing the peace.

Start public trials of Saddam Hussein and other top regime officials. Part of the public anti-Baathist fervor derives from the fact that, despite the imprisonment of 11,000 people, none has been tried for a crime or even charged with one. Iraqis are clamoring for justice for the mass killings, tortures, and other abuses of Hussein's dictatorship. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have advocated the creation of an international tribunal to try Hussein and other officials accused of crimes against humanity. But the Bush administration, in keeping with its long hostility toward world tribunals such as the International Criminal Court, has insisted on trials presided by Iraqi judges. Meanwhile, the U.S. military seems reluctant to release any of its prisoners to the Iraqi courts.

Give the United Nations overall control of the Iraqi transition process, even though not all attacks will cease.

Baathists insist that the United Nations is not the enemy, despite the terrorist bombings in August and September that caused it to flee the country. "If the United Nations is acting by itself, and not just on behalf of the Americans, it will be welcomed," said a former high-ranking Foreign Ministry official. "When I see a blue helmet, it's totally different from seeing an American helmet, even psychologically. If the United Nations took over from the Americans, it would create a new atmosphere."

Many Baathists whom I interviewed took pains to explain that the guerrillas are not terrorists and do not seek the return of Saddam Hussein to power. But these Baathists only grudgingly admitted the obvious—that there are indeed real extremists among the resistance, including foreign jihadis who may continue using terrorist attacks under any circumstances. When pressed, the Baathists gave varying estimates for how much the violence would decrease if their demands were addressed. "Maybe 60 percent?" said a former Republican Guard colonel in Baghdad, flummoxed by the question. "I don't know. Maybe 90 percent? We can't guarantee everything."

Call up the former Iraqi army and security agencies. Among nearly all Sunnis and even among many U.S. officials, there is general consensus that the American decision soon after the war to disband the Iraqi army and security services was a disaster. The move put about 500,000 people out of work, and even though many of them are now receiving stop-gap payments from the coalition authorities, they are a dissatisfied, armed, and dangerous group, with plenty of time on their hands to cause trouble.

"We had a policy in the army that if you didn't have anything for your soldiers to do, you should march them around and make them dig holes and fill them up again all day until they're too tired to do anything but go to bed," said the former Iraqi general. "Just keep them busy, otherwise they'll

make trouble. The Americans don't understand this." The Republican Guard colonel agrees. "If you call back the army, in one week you will recruit 200,000 people," he said. "If there are bad people you want to keep out, you can do it afterward."

Any move to reconstitute the military and security services would be needed only in the Sunni Triangle area, and would need to be subject to rigorous vetting. Many Shiite and Kurdish leaders are strongly opposed to the idea, and instead support the creation of militias that they control. All these forces should be incorporated into a new Iraqi army, run on a decentralized, regional basis yet with overall central command in Baghdad.

Keep U.S. troops out of main Sunni cities and replace them with foreign troops, preferably from non-neighbor-ing Arab and Muslim nations. Despite their recent anti-American protests, Shiites are less implacably hostile to the presence of American troops than Sunni radicals and Baathists. For that reason, it is not urgent to replace the Americans with foreigners in southern Iraq. In the Sunni Triangle, however, the overwhelming majority of people say they want the U.S. troops to get out of the cities and towns (although they seem not to care if there are bases just over the horizon).

"People here hate the American troops, but only because they are here in town doing things they shouldn't," said Abdelkader al-Alousy, a Sunni cleric who is spokesman for the Center for Religious Teaching and Research, a religious institute in Falluja, and director of its Higher Commission for Fatwas, which issues religious edicts. "The Americans can have bases out in the desert if they want. Just get them out of the streets here. Then people will stop attacking them."

UN officials say they expect that Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and Bangladesh would be willing to send large numbers of troops under a Security Council mandate if the arrangement appeared to have support among Baathists, radical Sunnis, and dissident Iraqi Shiites.

In all, the above set of possible solutions represents a big policy gamble. Elections could bring to power Shiite groups that have long been allied with Iran (but now insist that they adhere to democracy). Baathist groups could win local and regional elections in the Sunni Triangle. Campaigning could bring ethnic tensions and riots, with Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, and secular urban dwellers at one another's throats.

But given the intractable guerrilla insurgency and the poisonous lack of public trust in U.S. intentions, the Bush administration's current policy is an even greater gamble. The result could be intensified violence and chaos that traps the next president, be it Bush or a Democrat, in a virtually inextricable quagmire. To expect Iraqis to forego real self-determination and allow a handpicked government to be imposed on them—at a time when their expectations for democracy have been raised sky high—could invite more sacrifice of American blood and prestige. ■

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Trading Down

It's not whether record trade deficits will become a full-blown currency crisis. It's when.

BY EAMONN FINGLETON

WHILE IT IS STILL UNCLEAR HOW LARGE THE TRADE problem will loom in the presidential election, there is surely plenty to be worried about. On several occasions under George W. Bush, the monthly trade deficit has exceeded the total annual deficit—\$41 billion—in the entire last year of his father's administration. Of course, Bush Junior cannot be blamed entirely for the deterioration. In reality, most of it occurred under Bill Clinton. But even compared with the record trade deficit in Clinton's last year in office, last year's ran about 20 percent higher.

In fact, figures soon to be released are expected to show that in 2003 the U.S. account for the first time topped the psychologically important 5-percent level. This was the worst performance since American economic statistics were first compiled in the 19th century. By comparison, the notorious U.S. trade crisis of 1971–72 was a mere blip: The trade deficit in 1972, approximately 0.5 percent of the gross domestic product, was less than one-tenth of the current level. In truth, America's current trade position is a time bomb that sooner or later will explode—with devastating political consequences for whichever luckless soul happens to occupy the Oval Office at the time.

Media interest in the trade story took a dive during the

euphoria of the dot-com bubble. Although the media interest has yet to fully recover, several key economic observers are sounding the alarm. MIT economist Lester Thurow, for instance, has suggested that the trade deficits are setting the scene for an eventually devastating currency crisis. In a new book, *Fortune Favors the Bold*, he argues that without careful handling, the dollar could plunge by half, propelling the global economy into a 1930s-style depression. Also publicly fretting is billionaire investor Warren Buffett. In an article in *Fortune* last fall, he proposed a complicated import-control system in which importers would bid in at public auctions for special permits to buy from abroad. For all this system's free-market fancy dress, its impact on U.S. trade would be virtually indistinguishable from that of an across-the-board tariff.

Thurow and Buffett are, of course, liberals whose views the Bush White House can readily discount. But prominent conservatives are also joining the clamor. A standout in this regard has been CNN's Lou Dobbs. Once seemingly prepared to accept mass layoffs as a necessary price for the benefits of globalism, Dobbs has in recent months emerged as perhaps the most trenchant critic of what free trade has done to the American manufacturing sector. Even Henry Kissinger has obliquely criticized the worsening trade trend. In a comment

last summer, he suggested that a nation that has lost its manufacturing base cannot long remain a world power.

"The question really is whether America can remain a great power or a dominant power if it becomes primarily a service economy, and I doubt that," Kissinger said in an *India Financial Express* article that appeared in July 2003. "I think that a country has to have a major industrial base in order to play a significant role in the world."

Sensing President Bush's vulnerability, the Democratic presidential contenders have also hardened their rhetoric on trade recently. In the words of veteran trade hawk Pat Buchanan, they are all "beginning to sound like Pat Buchanan now."

BY ALL WORLD STANDARDS, AMERICA'S TRADE DEFICITS are stunningly out of line. An analysis of six major economies—the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, and Italy—shows that it is generally only during or immediately after a war that rich nations have incurred trade deficits even remotely comparable to America's recent performance. Indeed, history records only one previous case of a major nation running a trade deficit of more than 5 percent of the GDP. This was Italy in 1924—hardly an auspicious precedent. In recent years, the consensus both on Wall Street and in the media has been that the trade deficits "don't mat-

American stocks and real estate, plus an ever rising share of U.S. Treasury bonds that is being bought by foreigners, particularly the governments of Japan, China, and other nations in the region. The question is how long foreigners will continue to finance a U.S. trade trend that they know is recklessly unsustainable.

In the meantime, foreign asset purchases are becoming an increasingly intrusive feature of the American economic landscape. In particular, foreigners are buying many of America's largest corporations outright. Such erstwhile pillars of U.S. industry as Amoco and Chrysler were bought in the late 1990s by British Petroleum and Daimler-Benz, respectively. In 2002, Lucent, heir to the fabled technological riches of Bell Labs, sold its optical-fiber business to Furukawa of Japan. Meanwhile, IBM announced the sale of its disk-drive business, a crucial high-tech operation that has played a historic role in the development of the global computer industry. Again the buyer was Japanese, in this case Hitachi. In effect, the United States is selling the family silver. Within the space of a single generation, it is disposing of much of its industrial and commercial base—a base that was built by many earlier generations of Americans.

Large parts of Wall Street have also come under foreign control. Names like Scudder Investments, Bankers Trust, First

Bush and his advisers can continue to brush aside the concerns of workers, but they won't be able to ignore a more powerful constituency: the world's financial markets.

ter." Unfortunately, the economic thinking underlying this conclusion is as facile as the profits-don't-matter ethos that fostered the ill-fated dot-com bubble. All wishful thinking to the contrary, trade is still an important indicator of an economy's health.

For starters, a worsening trade trend has obvious implications for jobs. Indeed, the U.S. economy has lost more than 2.5 million manufacturing jobs just since Bush took office. Some observers argue that cuts in American manufacturing jobs are an inevitable, indeed welcome, reflection of rising productivity. They point out that other advanced economies, including Japan, have seen large declines in manufacturing employment over the last decade. But this comparison is highly misleading. In sharp contrast to the United States, none of the other nations usually mentioned in this context is running chronic trade deficits. (Japan, for instance, continues to run the world's largest surpluses—about four times China's.) By contrast, America's vast trade deficits incontrovertibly testify to an unhealthy weakness in U.S. manufacturing output. What's more, even if most displaced manufacturing workers eventually do find work in services, they can rarely match their previous wage levels.

Bush and his advisers can continue to brush aside the concerns of American industrial workers, but they won't be able to ignore a more powerful constituency: the world's financial markets. Why? Trade deficits have to be financed. For every \$1 of current account deficit the United States incurs, it has to sell \$1 of American assets abroad. Much of the financing comes in the form of foreigners' purchases of

Boston, Alliance Capital, Republic Bank, Kemper Corporation, Alex Brown, and Dillon Read may still sound American, but these former pillars of the U.S. financial establishment are now controlled from places like Zurich, Frankfurt, Paris, and London. Even the American book-publishing industry is now largely foreign-owned. According to one estimate, German companies alone now account for more than half the industry. American publishers that are now German-owned include Random House; St. Martin's Press; Doubleday; Crown; and Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Even Clinton's memoirs are to be published by a foreign-owned publisher—the Knopf imprint of Random House. (Random House was taken over by the German Bertelsmann group in 1998.)

All these sales have already undermined the United States' economic standing on the world stage. While this may not be obvious to the American public, it is shockingly clear in national asset and liability figures compiled by the International Monetary Fund. These show that between 1989 and 2000, America's net foreign liabilities ballooned from \$47 billion to nearly \$2.2 trillion. Lester Thurow's figures predict that the current trade deficit could run between 7 percent and 8 percent of the GDP by 2010, while Washington-based economist Pat Choate has suggested that the deficit could reach 10 percent of the GDP by 2013.

One key factor sustaining the upward trend is outsourcing: Given that wages in even the most advanced regions of China run less than one-quarter of American levels, no likely revaluation of the Chinese yuan is going to dissuade corporate America from shifting jobs to China.

Perhaps more worryingly, the trend to outsource service jobs such as the writing of software and the designing of computer chips to places like India, the Philippines, and Malaysia is just beginning. The effects are apparent in America's traditional service surpluses, which have been in free fall since 1997. Assuming unchanged exchange rates, they could well disappear within a decade.

Another exacerbating factor is oil. Given America's ever increasing dependence on foreign supplies, oil import costs are bound to rise even without any further increases in oil prices. Add in a 1970s-style oil shock (which could be triggered by China's rapidly growing oil imports) and the trade deficits could easily increase by between \$50 billion and \$100 billion a year.

Perhaps the most alarming news of all is that America's foreign-debt problem is now feeding on itself. In the words of the prominent British fund manager and financial commentator Marshall Auerback, America has entered a banana republic-style "debt trap." The nub of the problem is in the vast and ever rising flow of dividends and interest payments that the United States must remit to foreign owners of U.S. assets. In a paper published in June 2003 by Chalmers Johnson's Japan Policy Research Institute, Auerback sketched out this truly alarming prognosis:

[T]he U.S. is a country with a trade deficit and must also borrow [abroad] to pay the interest on its debt. Because the interest rate on that debt exceeds the U.S.'s growth rate, the compounding of capitalized interest payments alone will tend to raise the nation's relative indebtedness. I expect that the chronic U.S. current account deficit and mounting external debt will ultimately raise long-term U.S. interest rates. And this, in turn will speed up the compounding of the interest due on the U.S. external debt and will make the debt trap dynamics even more vicious. At that point, what author Charles Kindleberger calls a "credit revulsion" might ensue, producing a catastrophic outcome for the U.S. economy.

Auerback is not alone in fearing the worst. Even the U.S. government's own Trade Deficit Review Commission has strongly hinted that America's current account imbalances are spiraling out of control. In a November 2000 report, it suggested that, even assuming the deficit in goods and services did not deteriorate further, the current account deficit could reach 7.5 percent of the GDP by 2010. Implicit in the commission's devastating analysis, which was discreetly published during the interregnum period after the last presidential election, was that the increase would be driven by rising debt-service costs, as America's foreign debt was likely to reach nearly 60 percent of the annual GDP in 2010 (up from 16 percent in 2000).

As if all this were not enough, the picture looks even bleaker when you consider the likely denouement. As people like Auerback and Thurow have suggested, a dollar devaluation seems unavoidable in the long run. But it will be a devaluation from hell. Already in the last year the dollar has fallen considerably against the euro. But even at today's rates, many American manufacturers know that they are still desperately noncompetitive. On paper, devaluation would seem like the right solution. After all, it immediately makes American goods cheaper to foreign consumers, and it thus should powerfully

stimulate America's exports. Similarly, a devaluation at home should enable American producers to win back much of the domestic market share previously lost to imports.

All this, however, is dependent on the assumption that U.S. manufacturing industries have plenty of unused capacities available to capitalize on post-devaluation opportunities. This assumption has long since ceased to be valid: After 30 years of rising merchandise trade deficits, much of America's once formidable manufacturing capacity has been wiped out. Thus, in the short to medium term, devaluation would actually prove counterproductive. This is because import volumes would hardly decrease while import costs would rise considerably. The backfire effect would be particularly marked in the case of imports from advanced manufacturing nations like Japan and Germany. These nations now increasingly specialize in producing goods that Americans can no longer make (or in some cases never have made), including advanced materials (such as the super-strong composites used in planes), key components (such as the more advanced components in cell phones), and sophisticated capital goods (everything from the semiconductor industry's "steppers" to television broadcasting equipment).

A KEY REASON WHY ALL THIS IS NOT BETTER UNDERSTOOD is that U.S. trade figures have tended to hide the true extent of the rot in American manufacturing. Because America's goods exports have shown a cumulative increase of more than 40 percent in the last decade, countless ivory-tower economists have blithely assumed that large swathes of American manufacturing remain reasonably competitive. In reality, much of the export growth in manufactured goods consists merely of the re-export of imported content. Virtually every American-manufactured product these days is heavily dependent on imported content. Indeed, America's most advanced manufacturers have led the trend to outsource the most difficult to make components and materials from former rivals in Japan and Germany. A classic in this regard is Boeing, which is relying on Japanese partners for much of the serious manufacturing in its forthcoming 7E7 jet.

Moreover, distribution patterns have changed in ways that tend to exaggerate American export strength. Take, for instance, how Asian manufacturers ship components to Mexican maquiladoras. They often airfreight the more valuable components to Los Angeles International Airport before shipping them south by truck. At the border, the Asian material is logged as high-tech American "exports" to Mexico. Similar distortions are at work in the recording of overland trade between Canada and Mexico.

So when can we expect a reckoning? Given that Asian nations remain eager to promote their export industries, the balance of probability is that the Bush administration can stagger through 2004 without suffering a truly devastating devaluation. Nonetheless, there is no gainsaying the fact that the United States is hurtling toward the tipping point in its trade with the rest of the world. And the longer the reckoning is postponed, the more painful and disruptive it will be. ■

EAMONN FINGLETON is the author of *Unsustainable: How Economic Dogma is Destroying American Prosperity*.

Offshore Thing

An easy way to slash the deficit and still finance social outlay: Go after the \$300 billion in taxes that aren't collected each year. Unfortunately, the Bush administration won't.

BY SAMUEL LOEWENBERG

George W. Bush seems to have the Democrats fiscally stymied. They can try to rescind most of his tax cuts, but as responsible fiscal stewards they would need that money to close his huge deficits—and could forget about addressing public needs. Alternatively,

they could try to restore social outlay and take a lot of heat for being irresponsible about the deficit.

In fact, there's another, far better option that almost nobody mentions: collecting the hundreds of billions of dollars that the taxman leaves on the table. According to estimates from former Internal Revenue Service officials and independent tax experts, between \$250 billion and \$300 billion in owed taxes goes uncollected every year. Today, federal revenue is just 16.6 percent of the gross domestic product, the lowest ratio in 45 years. And corporate tax receipts are down to just 1.2 percent of the GDP, which is nearly half of what it was in 1998 and 25 percent less than it was in 1990 during the last recession. This revenue erosion is only partly due to Bush's tax cuts or the recent recession. In little-noticed moves over the last decade, Congress and the current administration have greatly eroded the ability of the federal government to collect taxes.

Going after this money wouldn't raise rates for law-abiding citizens. It would simply force tax cheats—in dollar terms, those are overwhelmingly corporations and the wealthy—to pay their fair share under existing tax laws. "The easiest way politically and substantively to address [policy] priorities should be more effectively enforcing the laws we now have against those who have been taking advantage of the system," Lawrence Summers, the former treasury secretary and current president of Harvard University, told me. While in government, Summers led a collaborative effort with the Europeans to crack down on offshore tax havens—an initiative that Bush appointees quickly killed. As Summers observes, a tax-enforcement strategy would give Democrats a way both to be fiscally responsible and to finance desperately needed social spending.

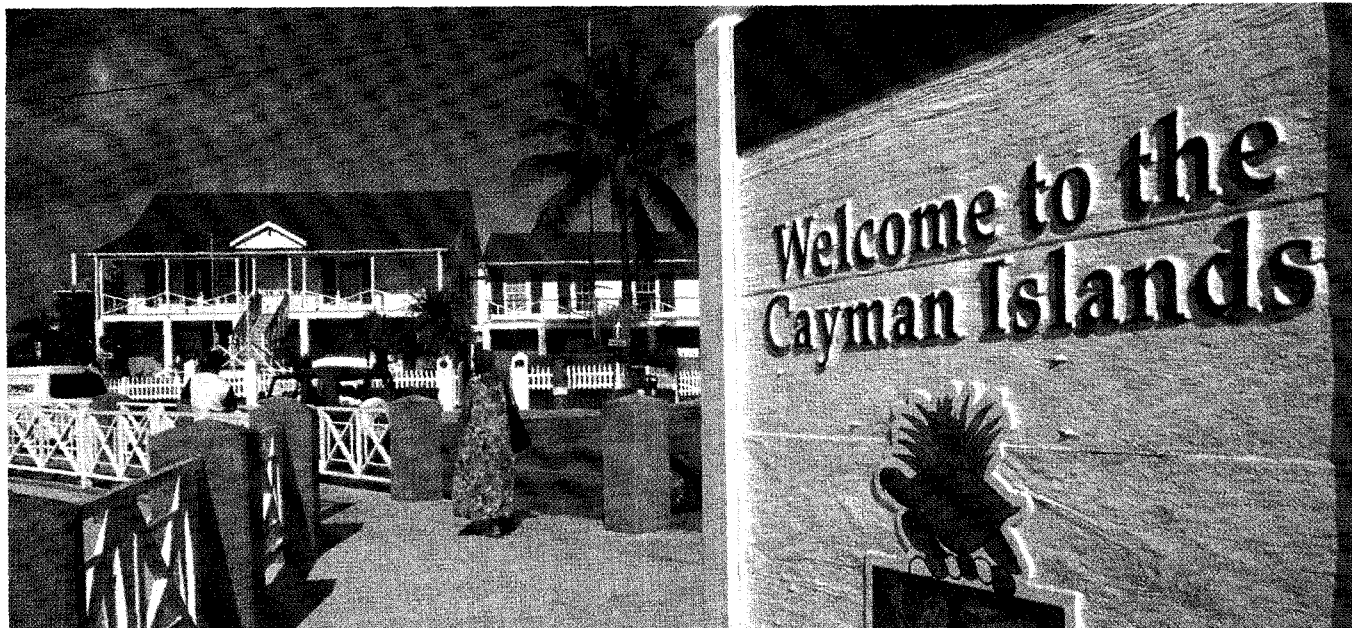
What happened to tax enforcement? It has been crippled by four overlapping assaults. In the 1990s, legitimate concern about a few overzealous prosecutions led Congress to create new "taxpayer rights" that hobbled legitimate tax collection. The Republican-led Congress underfunded the IRS,

and the Bush administration has steered its audit efforts away from corporations and the wealthy. New loopholes written into the tax code made it easier for legitimate tax-avoidance maneuvers to slide into illegal—but hard to uncover—tax evasion. And the use of foreign tax havens became ever more brazen.

ACCORDING TO RECENT CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS, MAJOR accomplices in spreading illegal or barely legal tax-avoidance schemes are the very accounting firms, investment banks, and white-shoe law partnerships that are supposed to be the country's financial gatekeepers. One former Treasury Department official calls them "the arms merchants behind the tax-evasion arms race." In fact, many of the "financial products" they peddle are simply different versions of the fraudulent tax shelters devised by some of the same people for companies like Enron and Tyco.

These tax schemes, which proliferated during the late 1990s boom, depend on the premise that they will be too complicated for regulators to understand. They utilize a multilayered web of sham tax-free entities, including partnerships, nonprofit corporations, and trust funds. One scheme, dubbed "Slapshot" by its purveyors at J.P. Morgan, was designed to save Enron \$120 million in taxes. The sleight of hand "was concealed within a mind-boggling array of loans, stock swaps, structured finance transactions," according to Senator Carl Levin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate investigations subcommittee of the Governmental Affairs Committee, who eventually uncovered the scheme.

Levin has been among a handful of legislators working to expose the institutionalization of tax scams. In November, he held hearings showing how the Big Four accounting firm KPMG made millions peddling abusive tax shelters. The hearing revealed the workings of one of the dodges marketed by the firm, dubbed "BLIPS": It started with a sham high-interest loan that was run through a paper partnership, which then formed a shell corporation, which then washed the money



Dodge City: Foreign tax havens cheat the IRS out of hundreds of millions each year.

through rigged foreign-currency trades. The scam had the cooperation of both a merchant bank and the white-shoe law firm Sidley Austin Brown & Wood, which wrote dozens of certification letters—at a cost of more than \$50,000 per letter—providing a legal basis for the scheme. In total, this one ploy cost taxpayers \$1.4 billion in lost revenue.

KPMG went even further, mass marketing these tax scams using a full-scale telemarketing center based in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This boiler-room operation (which the firm called its “Tax Innovation Center”) made hundreds of hard-sell cold calls pushing the firm’s more than 500 tax shelters. The four schemes examined by Levin’s staff earned the firm \$124 million in fees between 1997 and 2001. KPMG’s response? “All major accounting firms, including KPMG, as well as prominent law firms, investment advisers, and financial institutions offered tax advice, including these types of strategies, to clients,” Philip Weisner, the partner in charge of the firm’s Washington national practice, told the Senate panel. Among the banks that aided and abetted KPMG’s schemes, Levin’s subcommittee found, were NatWest, Deutsche Bank, and UBS.

According to *New York Times* tax correspondent David Cay Johnston, tax-exempt entities from Indian tribes to pension plans to Dutch banks with offices in the West Indies regularly “rent out” their tax-exempt status to tax cheats, for a relatively small fee and at virtually no risk to themselves. In his new book, *Perfectly Legal*, Johnston traces the tangled path of a typical scam, where the law, if not technically broken, was badly bent. In one dodge favored by the super rich, the vehicle is a small insurance company granted tax-free status to help it serve rural populations. While the company is only permitted to collect a few hundred thousand dollars in premiums, there is no limit on the amount of capital that can be invested in them and later pulled out, tax-free. Johnston found that one of Wall Street’s richest players, Peter R. Kellogg, used just such a scheme to avoid more than \$190 million in taxes.

Tax avoiders can feel secure that there is little chance their scams will ever be exposed: Only one in 400 partnerships is ever audited. In 2000 more than \$5 trillion passed through some 7.5 million partnerships, many of them created solely to save taxes. The IRS audited less than 30,000 of them. Why? Tax officials have essentially thrown up their hands. “The IRS was no match for this kind of stuff,” says Joseph Guttentag, who served as deputy assistant treasury secretary in the Clinton administration. Current and former officials blame the combination of funding cuts, congressional mandates, and the speed at which these scams reproduce and mutate. “Recognizing the IRS’ diminished capacity, promoters and some tax professionals are selling a wide range of tax schemes and devices designed to improperly reduce taxes to taxpayers based on the simple premise they can get away with it,” wrote former IRS Commissioner Charles Rossotti in his final report to the IRS Oversight Board at the end of 2002. Hardly a liberal, Rossotti is a Republican who was appointed by Bill Clinton and served during the first two years of the Bush administration before joining the Republican merchant bank The Carlyle Group. He estimated the loss in tax revenue to questionable partnerships alone to be \$100 billion a year.

This laxness is, of course, no accident. Going easy on tax avoiders benefits what Johnston calls “the political donor class,” whose members overwhelmingly support Republican candidates. Because investors were among those who suffered, Congress and the administration responded to the recent accounting frauds of Enron and others by passing sweeping reform legislation and increasing funding of the Securities and Exchange Commission. But when the IRS is cheated, it’s only government that loses revenue.

SINCE THE 1994 REPUBLICAN TAKEOVER, CONGRESS HAS consistently squeezed the IRS’ budget. Consequently, in the last decade, the number of IRS employees has dropped by 19,000 overall. The agency was hit disproportionately hard

among its compliance staff. Today it has 21,421 employees, down 28 percent since 1992, while tax avoidance schemes have expanded exponentially. There is, Rossotti wrote in his final report, "a huge gap between the number of taxpayers who are not filing, not reporting or not paying what they owe, and the IRS' capacity to require them to comply." Today only 1.1 percent of corporations are audited, down from 3 percent in 1992.

Things got even worse for the IRS' efforts in 1996, when the newly GOP-controlled Congress held hearings on abusive practices—not by tax cheats but by the IRS. Witnesses told tale after tale of abuse by rabid tax police. Ultimately much of the testimony turned out to be greatly exaggerated or even false. Still, the few bad eggs that were discovered were enough to give the GOP an excuse to crack down on the

and the IRS itself. Still, the penalties for the poor can be harsh: Congress gave the agency the power to withhold tax credits for between two and 10 years. That's a far more severe punishment than the penalties faced by the promoters of illegal tax shelters, who'd be assessed fines of \$1,000 for individuals and \$10,000 for corporations. As Senator Levin noted, for the professionals who bilk taxpayers out of billions of dollars, the deterrence value of those penalties is effectively zero.

TAX AVOIDERS HAVE ANOTHER EASY STRATEGY FOR HIDING their profits: booking them in offshore tax havens. By sheltering profits in tiny nations with no corporate taxes, such individuals and corporations can avoid being taxed in either Europe or the United States, costing governments billions of

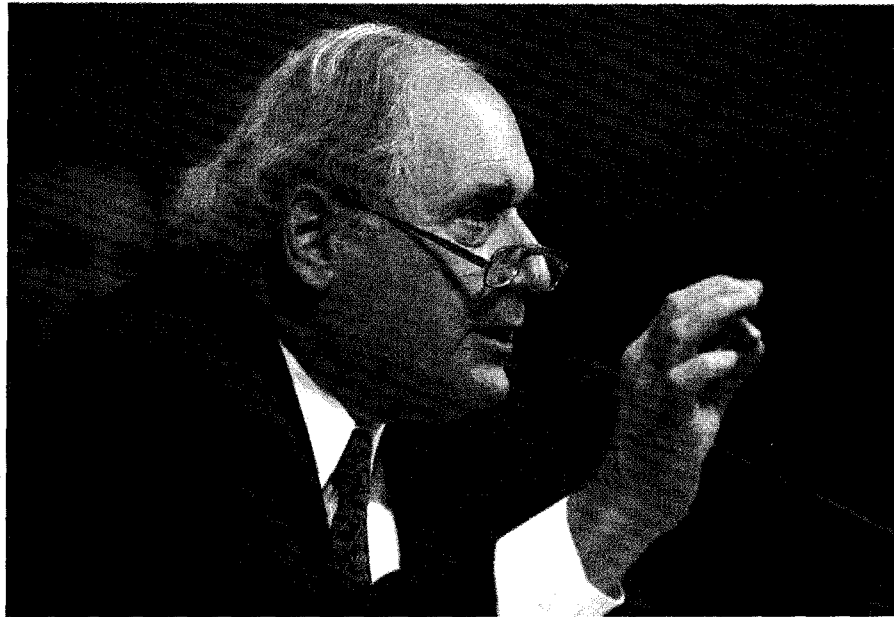
dollars in lost revenue. In the last two decades, the number of offshore companies, sham firms, or simply brass-plate operations (companies with no business other than to hide profits) has exploded. In 1983 these offshore tax havens held \$200 billion. Today that number has increased 25-fold to \$5 trillion. The Congressional Budget Office puts the annual loss to the U.S. Treasury from offshore tax cheating at \$85 billion a year.

In this arena, too, the Bush administration has been complicit. In 1998, the Clinton administration reached an agreement with the European Union to crack down on foreign tax havens and collect hundreds of billions in taxes. The agreement would have required extensive reporting of transactions to authorities in the United States and European Union, effectively shutting

down the most flagrant abuses. Almost immediately upon taking office, Bush officials gutted the program.

A common tax dodge among doctors and lawyers is to hide income in a tax haven and then access the bank account via credit card. This is virtually untraceable because the tax haven's authorities don't report transactions (that's what makes it a tax haven). IRS subpoenas from MasterCard and Visa found that between 1 million and 2 million Americans held credit cards issued by offshore banks. And yet the agency has had the resources to prosecute only a handful of these cases.

Another dodge is a corporation's fictitious move offshore. This is legal under existing law, although one of the country's most respected regulators called it "morally appalling." The scheme is known in tax jargon as an "inversion" because it creates a shell company in the offshore jurisdiction while turning the U.S. company (where the actual headquarters are located) into a subsidiary. Then the company reaps its profits in the tax-free jurisdiction while keeping losses in the U.S. subsidiary. Inversions date back to the 1980s, but they became really popular after Tyco used one in 1997. By 2001, Tyco claimed that "moving" to Bermuda had saved it \$400 mil-



The Collector: Michigan Democratic Senator Carl Levin uncovered a scheme to save Enron \$120 million.

agency. The 1998 IRS Restructuring and Reform Act mandated that a complaint against an IRS employee would trigger an investigation that could lead to dismissal. "The employees felt if they made a tiny error they would be fired," said Rossotti. The chilling effect was almost immediate. In 1999, the year after the law took effect, property seizures dropped 98 percent, levies on bank accounts fell by three-fourths, and property liens dropped by two-thirds, according to Johnston.

At the same time, Congress has given the IRS funding since 1995 to target one class of potential tax cheats, the working poor, who the agency claimed were costing it more than \$6.5 billion a year due to fraud and mistakes on Earned Income Tax Credit paperwork. By 2002, with its number of auditors reduced by one-fourth, the agency spent its precious resources auditing five times as many people receiving the Earned Income Tax Credit as the rich, according to Johnston. From a revenue-collecting standpoint, the move doesn't make much sense: The government can hope to regain only a few thousand dollars from the vast majority of these people, most of whom are guilty only of errors, not fraud, according to reports by the General Accounting Office

lion in tax payments. At the time, Tyco was seen as an innovator, and the firm's stock price shot through the roof, according to Reuven Avi-Yonah, an expert on international tax policy at the University of Michigan Law School. (Of course, the industrial conglomerate has since come unraveled after a major criminal fraud investigation.) This dodge was so appealing that a partner at the accounting firm Ernst & Young wrote in a post-September 11 online sales pitch, "The improvement on earnings is powerful enough to say that maybe the patriotism should take a back seat."

The first serious attempt to crack down on tax havens did not come until the late 1990s, when the problem of hiding profits offshore had grown out of control. According to a 2001 article in the journal *Accounting Today*, the U.S. government received only 340 reports about U.S. accounts in Panama, despite the fact that most of the 370,000 offshore corporations there are controlled by U.S. citizens. From the Netherlands Antilles, which houses 21,000 offshore corporations, the IRS received only 200 reports. "It started out as flea bites and became the economic equivalent of smallpox," said Jonathan M. Winer, former Clinton deputy assistant secretary of state for international law enforcement. "It's economic and tax piracy."

Cayman Islands, initially agreed to many of the provisions. The Bush administration then brought the OECD project to a grinding halt. The prime mover behind the administration's retreat was a Washington group called The Center for Freedom and Prosperity, which has held pro-tax haven rallies around the world, including in Barbados and Ottawa during the last OECD meeting. Critics call it "the tax cheats lobby." The group won't reveal its funders, but it's associated with The Heritage Foundation, the right-wing think tank that was another major force behind the administration's decision. (One of the center's founders comes from Heritage, and the two organizations work in concert with one another on this issue.)

The groups have powerful friends in Congress, including Assistant Senate Majority Leader Don Nickles, who sent a hand-signed letter to Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill in February 2001 asking him to drop the project. (The letter was reportedly written by The Center for Freedom and Prosperity.) House Majority Leader Dick Armey said that the OECD project was the work of the "global tax police." The anti-OECD forces also met with top Bush economic advisers Glenn Hubbard and Lawrence Lindsey, as well as Cesar Conda, domestic-policy adviser to Vice President Dick

The Clinton administration joined with France, Germany, and Japan to crack down on tax shelters through a range of methods. Bush brought the effort to a grinding halt.

Recognizing that hundreds of billions of dollars were being drained from the Treasury Department, the Clinton administration joined with France, Germany, and Japan in 1998 to create an ambitious program to crack down on abusive offshore tax shelters. The effort was made through the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a group of 30 developed nations that tries to promote joint policy through consensus. The project aimed to stop countries with no real economies, and with extremely low or zero taxes, from providing havens for multinationals and rich individuals looking to hide their incomes in purely sham transactions. As a recent report on tax avoidance issued by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the German Social Democratic think tank, noted, "Markets have globalized, yet tax structures have remained largely national.... [T]ax havens allow financial institutions to outflank the regulation of financial markets in their home countries."

The OECD project proposed to clamp down on tax havens by pressuring them to end particularly egregious tax breaks and forcing them to report financial data. Identifying 35 nations with particularly abusive tax practices, the OECD wanted to force them to start sharing data on foreign account holders, to stop permitting paper companies with no economic substance, to cease giving special tax breaks to foreigners that were not available to their own citizens, and to desist from cutting secret deals with individual taxpayers.

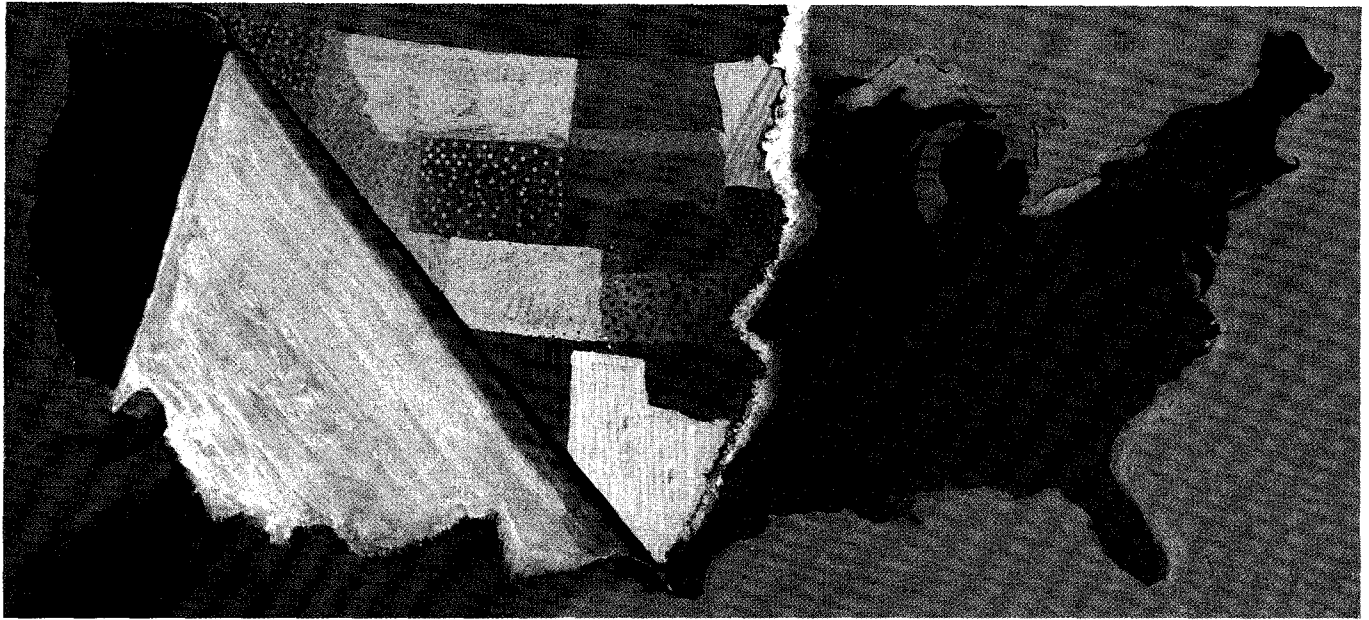
The tax havens were understandably resistant, as such moves would have effectively taken away much of their appeal. Still, the pressure was so great that some of the most well-established tax havens, including Barbados and the

Cheney, in the spring of 2001. In March of that same year, they even got the Congressional Black Caucus to weigh in with a letter to the administration claiming the project would hurt developing countries.

By May 2001, Secretary O'Neill announced that the administration was pulling back from the OECD. He was concerned, he said, "by the notion that lower taxes are naturally questionable and that one country or a group of countries could interfere in another country's decision to organize its own tax system." Without the support of the United States the project has been floundering. The OECD has dropped most of the requirements for changing tax practices, leaving only a voluntary information-sharing component. The project's teeth, which included cutting off noncompliant tax havens from access to U.S. banks, are gone.

A bipartisan group of former IRS commissioners wrote in June 2001 to the administration, begging it to change its stance. Their appeal fell on deaf ears. Legal or not, Republicans seem plenty happy with the current state of affairs, as long as it shrinks government. But for Democrats who believe government has a responsibility to society, the tax-collection issue is vitally important. Without revenue, there can be no social spending, no deficit reduction, and no dealing with the crises in health care, the environment, and education. Republicans seem to have figured this out. Most Democrats haven't connected the dots. ■

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Contesting Values

In 1988, the Democrats got clobbered in an election-year culture war. But that was then. The America of 2004 is a very different place, and the time is ripe to wage a new battle.

BY STANLEY B. GREENBERG AND ANNA GREENBERG

IN HIS STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS, PRESIDENT BUSH told a rapt nation and the assembled government of the United States that our nation faces grave threats and must live up to its “great responsibilities,” which include defending the “pillars of our civilization”: our “families and schools and religious congregations.” What is more, he warned, America can only be strong if we “value the institution of marriage.” Citing the threat of activist judges poised to impose gay marriage on a reluctant nation, Bush vowed to “defend the sanctity of marriage.”

Through these remarks, Bush made clear his desire to put values at the center of the public debate in 2004. The political calculation hardly seems difficult in light of presumed public prejudices. According to national polls, Republicans are preferred to Democrats by a margin of 22 percentage points when it comes to promoting strong moral values (45 percent to 23 percent); it’s an advantage that extends to almost all family-related areas, from teaching young people right from wrong (plus 18 points) to promoting personal responsibility (plus 12 points). A sizeable majority (56 per-

cent to 30 percent) opposes legal recognition of gay marriage, although the public is more conflicted over a constitutional amendment.

In making this strategic choice, the president showed the resolve of someone who has taken to heart *The Two Americas: Our Current Political Deadlock and How to Break It*, and now confidently confronts a political landscape strewn with groups worried about the erosion of our values and threats to the family.

In the Republican-loyalist world, he sees the white rural citizens who make up one in five voters and are conveniently concentrated in the battleground states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Nevada, Arizona, Maine, and New Hampshire. These voters believe their families are under assault by Hollywood, video games, television, and the influences on their children over which they have little control, including morally lapsed politicians, now indelibly associated with the Democrats. For white evangelicals and the rapidly growing, socially conservative exurban communities on the fringe of so many Sun Belt metropolitan areas, Bush’s

Liberals have come to expect their values to suffer ritual abuse every presidential election year, and Democratic candidates have either tried to change the subject or tripped over themselves pretending to be like Republicans. Will the pattern reassert itself this fall? The Prospect asked several writers to weigh in on different aspects of the values dilemma. They don’t all agree with one another, but each has something important to say.

State of the Union message is intended as a kind of gospel that will further energize the Republican base. GOP operatives go into this election armed with new plans to scour the churches in search of the 4 million evangelicals who dared not vote in 2000.

And in the world of contested and dislodged voters, the dominant bloc is the older, blue-collar, more traditional white families, concentrated in the industrial states of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and Michigan. They, too, are alarmed about pervasive moral laxity and threats to the traditional family.

Given the political landscape and opportunity, America might as well prepare now for another culture war, a repeat of the first President Bush's ugly assault on Michael Dukakis and the hapless Democrats of 1988. Then, George Bush Senior posed a relentless set of values choices: "Should public school teachers be required to lead our children in the pledge of allegiance? My opponent says 'no,' and I say 'yes.' Should society be allowed to impose the death penalty on those who commit crimes of extraordinary cruelty and violence? My opponent says 'no,' but I say 'yes.' And should our children have the right to say a voluntary prayer, or even observe a moment of silence in the schools? My opponent says 'no,' but I say 'yes.'"

Considering the current Bush's reliance on the strategic plans of Karl Rove, who introduced Bush Senior to Lee Atwater, it is not hard to imagine that the current Democratic nominee will soon be in the dock as well. In a way, the scrutiny has already begun: In *The New Republic*, Michael Grunwald forced readers to relive John Kerry's 1996 near-death campaign, in which the senator was readily caricatured as Michael Dukakis' lieutenant governor—implausibly lax with the worst murderers and drug addicts (even those who sold drugs to children), opposed to welfare reform and work, and anxious to raise taxes on working people. Now, it seems, he wants to bring the liberals' culture war to the family itself.

Are Democrats seriously at risk of reliving 1988 and falling in battle again, as Dukakis did when he crashed on the cultural ramparts? Should the Democrats prepare for culture war? If so, how should they arm themselves?

Fortunately for Democrats, the America of 2004 is not the America of 1988. Democrats are in a better position to accept the values challenge and to take the offensive in their own kind of war, very different in character from that of 1988. Of course, if the Democratic nominee is hopelessly secular, flat-footed and tone-deaf, he could easily fall in this fight.

One cannot underestimate the explosive possibilities of opening the gay-marriage door, as Bill Clinton found when opening the door to gays in the military. The prospective losses across the political landscape are real, but hardly inevitable. Indeed, we may look back on the president's State of the Union and defense of the institution of marriage as the call that gave new energy and purpose to the Democratic challenge.

NOT THE AMERICA OF 1988

While the cultural battle lines on abortion, homosexuality, and guns remain, America is a different place in 2004. Today the country is more diverse, more secular, better educated, and more socially progressive, reflecting demographic, societal, and cultural changes that have been under way for the past 20 years. Despite increasing differences among Americans, cultural mores have evolved to the point that television programs featuring gay characters are commonplace, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is one of the most popular shows on TV, and the Style section of *The New York Times* reports that it is cool to be ethnically ambiguous.

As leading census projections reveal, America is becoming increasingly diverse. In 2004, a quarter of the electorate will be nonwhite, and in the next 50 years, America will become a majority nonwhite country, a reflection of increasing immigration and growth among groups such as Hispanics. In fact, among voters under 25 years of age, just two-thirds are white, compared with 90 percent among seniors.

The nation is also increasingly less traditional. Instead of the nuclear families of the 1950s, a near majority of the country now lives in unmarried households, headed by one who has delayed marriage, is a single parent, been divorced or widowed, or lives with a domestic partner.

Too, the country is more secular and better educated. While the United States remains one of the most religious Western industrialized nations, it is also the case that a growing number of people are willing to answer "nothing" when asked their religious affiliation. The number of secular voters in the electorate has increased to the point that people who never or hardly ever go to worship services now make up a third of the electorate.

Americans are achieving higher and higher levels of education, and the number of women receiving a college education has tripled over the past 50 years. Women now make up the majority of students attending college and 52 percent of the electorate.

The political geography of the nation is shifting as well. The "blue states," covering considerably more territory than 1988, encompass what Ruy Teixeira and John B. Judis call "ideopolises," or new postindustrial metropolises where people are more likely to live according to "socially liberal values."

These demographic changes have profound implications for American politics, as we see the growth of socially progressive groups in the electorate—minority voters and immigrants, unmarried women, college-educated women, and cosmopolitan voters—who share a worldview that accepts differences, values tolerance, and supports equal rights.

In the context of these broad changes, the country's youngest voters are more socially progressive than any other generation in the electorate. They are quite alienated from the Republicans' social agenda, in particular their focus on gay rights and gay marriage. Almost three-quarters of those

Should the Democrats prepare for another culture war? And if so, how should they arm themselves?

18 to 24 years old say there should be “laws that provide gay and lesbian couples who form civil unions the same legal rights as married couples when it comes to things like inheritance, employer-provided health insurance, and hospital visits.” More than half of adults under 30 years of age think that gays and lesbians should have a legal right to get married, compared with just 37 percent of baby boomers and 20 percent of seniors. And in our recent National Public Radio survey, 43 percent of voters under 30 oppose a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, compared with 29 percent of voters over 64.

Younger voters and the other most progressive groups, such as unmarried women and minority voters, make up a major portion of the voters this election year. Voters under 30 will account for 17 percent of voters, unmarried women constitute 20 percent of all voters, while nearly one in four voters in 2004 will be a minority.

We do live in postindustrial, perhaps postmodern, times, where conventional wisdom seems to be giving way to more contingent principles shaped by education, information, and individual experience. Large numbers of people and communities are surely questioning and challenging these trends,

Americans are, by their own admission, religious. Ninety-two percent say they believe in God, 80 percent pray, and 37 percent read the Bible on a weekly basis. A little less than half report attending worship services every week (though it is quite well established that church attendance is overreported). Seventy percent of Americans say they want their president to be religious.

The strongest Democratic candidates in the last four decades have hailed from the South, which is important not so much because they brought along southern votes—though that helps—but because southern politicians more naturally and instinctively employ a religious narrative. This narrative matters not just in the southern states but also in many rural and industrial places where religion is important to family life.

When Al Gore chose Joe Lieberman, a devout Orthodox Jew, as his running mate, the easy discussion of faith and family, on display at the Democratic convention, offered important reassurance and brought the Democrats closer to most Americans. And this newfound connection shone through in polls at the time: In a *Newsweek* survey taken before Lieberman’s selection, Bush held a 23-point advan-

This year’s candidate, unlike Michael Dukakis, will not go back to being governor or senator but will be a full-time campaigner, raising questions about Bush’s values.

but it is hard not to be struck by America’s growing diversity, tolerance of different lifestyles, social flexibility and openness to change, new roles for women, and skepticism about absolutes and religious truths.

So while we recognize that the campaign against gay marriage and defense of the family can seriously damage Democratic prospects, we also recognize that Republicans can overreach. The public divides evenly in this debate, according to the NPR survey, when the Democrats criticize the Republicans for trying “to dictate the personal and private choices people make about their families.” It is possible the Democratic candidate could join the culture war and fight to a draw, though we do not recommend that course. Remember that Al Gore virtually ran such a race in 2000, unapologetically backing abortion, gun registration, and civil unions against the backdrop of the “Clinton Wars.” With the country divided equally between the married and unmarried, those who are weekly church attendees and those who are not, Democrats and Republicans, the specter of a battle over values should not leave Democrats trembling. Joining the battle is an insufficient strategy in the context of our current political parity, but noting the cultural trends should give Democrats greater confidence as they face the battles ahead.

REAL FAITH

All that said, Democrats would fare much better in the elections if they nominate a presidential candidate who instinctively understands a religious worldview. A majority of

tage over Gore on who would do a better job of upholding moral values. However, less than two weeks after the Gore-Lieberman ticket was established, this gap evaporated, with Gore taking a 4-point lead over Bush on moral values.

But uncomfortable discussions of personal faith, reflected perhaps in Howard Dean’s discussion of religion under pressure in the primaries, looked inauthentic and obviously brought the former governor no closer to the primary voters. Policy initiatives can also communicate powerfully about values. In 1992, Bill Clinton used dramatic, unexpected initiatives to reveal his values and show his affinity with mainstream thinking. For him, the most important steps were “ending welfare as we know it,” supporting the death penalty, and cutting middle-class taxes. Each figured prominently in the campaign’s advertising, and welfare reform was later recalled as one of the top three priorities of the new administration.

The Democrats in 2004, faced with the Bush administration’s values onslaught and defense of marriage, will no doubt move dramatically to show their underlying values, and perhaps in surprising ways. Any specific recommendations given here would be speculative absent a nominee and his biography and convictions, but it is easy to imagine the Democrats embracing, for example, a new pro-family policy, led by middle-class tax cuts, paid family leave, health care, and church-based social services. Too, the candidate could put forward a pro-military policy, focused on building the morale and strengthening the military and waging a more focused war on terrorism, and a values-based critique

of the exploding federal deficits and corporate excesses, with Democrats as the voice of responsibility, prudence, discipline, and the future. The leading Democratic candidates emerging from the primary want to strengthen families; they are opposed to legalizing gay marriage even as they support partner benefits and legal status for civil unions. They avoid the symbolic cultural issues, like gun control, that distance Democrats from so much of “red” America.

And the Democratic candidate, unlike Michael Dukakis, will not go back to being governor or senator and tending his garden after the nomination is won but, instead, will be a full-time campaigner, aggressively pushing back against attacks and raising questions about the values now dominant in Bush’s Washington.

BOLD POLITICS

If the Republicans are as intent on “shock and awe” cultural war now as they were in 1988, Democrats can parry on their values of tolerance, diversity, equality, individuality, and privacy, and provide powerful reassurance that they, far from being culturally elitist, are patriotic, responsible, in-touch, respectful of faith, and devoted to family. Rather than be apologetic about values, Democrats should rise to this challenge with confidence.

But simply contesting values and responding to Bush’s defense of marriage is both defensive and unambitious. It is a formula for winning by a hair at best and still leaves us subject to the vagaries of butterfly ballots and/or unexpected events, like the capture of Osama bin Laden. After all, why should Democrats accept an electoral formula that has left us short of a majority in the last three presidential elections? Why should we accept the cultural battle lines that leave out so many issues and voters? Yes, we are confident of our values, but we are also confident that voters want this election to address so many other issues important to their lives.

With control over all the institutions of government and with so many resources, the Republicans will invest heavily in the political status quo. But why should the Democrats?

This year offers a potentially much bigger moment for a much bigger election—if Democrats respond in a bold way to the opportunities that have come together in this period, as underscored in *The Two Americas*. This is a moment to challenge the whole Bush-Reagan edifice that the Republicans have constructed, without a mandate and very much without public support. Consider for a moment their tax-cut policies, their priorities for reconstruction in Iraq, and their indifference to health care. On all of these issues, there is a yawning agenda gap between the American people and the American government. All this is gaining urgency because of more than two decades of growing income inequality and growing dissatisfaction with middle-class living standards, job loss, and shrinking opportunities.

The entire ground can shift if the Democrats use this electoral moment to mount an assault not just on specific policies but on the entire Reagan project—the idea that tax cuts for the wealthy and enriching the few and pro-market and corporate policies are really the best way to advance the coun-

try. By joining the battle here, at the heart of Reaganism, the Democrats make it very difficult for the Republicans to keep this election centered on the family or gay marriage. They will have to defend Reaganism.

Because the Republicans have overreached on behalf of corporate interests in an age of public revulsion against it, the Democrats have the opportunity not just to attack but to become the champions of the whole. While Republicans seek to get 100 percent of the base voters in the old construct, Democrats can advance strategically toward their goal of a 100-percent America where all can share in the country’s bounty. The Democrats can become the voice of opportunity, responsibility, and community in an era of greed and superindividualism. Democrats can, in short, speak for America.

In the summer of 2003, we asked a thousand Americans in a national survey whether they would opt for the Reagan alternative—with its tax cuts, respect for faith, and a strong military response to the terrorist threat—or whether they would prefer a vision of a 100-percent America, with its focus on the middle-class squeeze, education, health care and retirement, and building opportunity at home. A majority of 53 percent chose the vision of 100-percent America, compared with 41 percent who opted for Bush’s renewed Reaganism. This is a 12-point lead for the Democratic narrative in a survey where the voters were evenly aligned between the parties and gave Bush a 7-point advantage in the presidential contest.

More important, this battle over Reaganism and for 100-percent opportunity disrupted the cultural polarization that has left the parties deadlocked. Democratic base groups were even more consolidated, but Democrats now won an audience with voters, previously moved by the cultural currents. The 100-percent America Democrat split the white rural vote evenly and won over many of the more vulnerable working-class women (and even aging blue-collar men). In a follow-up focus-group discussion, many of these estranged voters found their voice, saying that through the 100-percent America message, “[T]his person’s trying to get the point across that every single American counts and not just the wealthy,” and that, “[W]e have a whole country here, and we need to help the whole country be all it can be.” Voters felt energized by the vision. As one man told us, “I like the spirit. I like the sense that we’re a country; let’s pull together, let’s make some sacrifices, let’s include everyone, let’s protect things.”

The Democrats should contest values, as we have argued here, but Democrats should also contest the country. This election presents the opportunity to marginalize the values and cultural onslaught of the Republicans—and to offer people a different kind of choice. ■

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On God and Democrats

Will religion give Democrats the usual fits this election year? Maybe. But it shouldn't be forgotten that there is a "religious left" in America—it just doesn't go around making lots of noise.

BY RICHARD PARKER

SHORTLY BEFORE THE 2000 PRESIDENTIAL RACE started, Gertrude Himmelfarb, the aging Athena of neoconservatism, found herself struggling to express what she felt were the core values differences between Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives. What she came up with was that America had become "one nation, two cultures." "One is religious, puritanical, family-centered, and somewhat conformist," wrote *The Economist* in describing her vision. "The other is tolerant, hedonistic, secular, predominantly single, and celebrates multiculturalism. These value judgments are the best predictor of political affiliation, far better than wealth or income."

By the time the 2000 election was over, however—even though Himmelfarb's candidate eventually won, with a little jurisprudential help—her "two cultures" idea looked pretty poor as a description of what divides her friends from ours. True, just as she said, 91 percent of George W. Bush's voters had freely identified themselves as "religious" to pollsters—but so had 81 percent of Al Gore's. And while Himmelfarb's reviled "seculars" did make up a fifth of Gore's support, they'd also been one in 10 of Bush's—hardly the signs of a black-and-white divide. But when it comes to faith-and-politics issues, unfortunately for the talking classes, polarity has always been far too simple a frame.

This year, religion is back in the news, and, not surprisingly, so are a lot of the same tired arguments—on both sides of the political fence. Himmelfarb herself has been missing, but absent her presence, and facing a president who drives liberals insane by invoking the Almighty every chance he gets, many of those same liberals have been worriedly wondering what's going on as the Democratic candidates stumble over themselves and one another in what seems at times a hell-bent rush to assure voters that they've "got religion," too. What, some ask, has come of separation of church and state? Is this the end of tolerance? Is there a spiritual inquisition ahead? Salem witch trials, anyone?

Just what sort of faith, and how much of it—and how good that is for the Democrats and the country—has not been an uncontroversial topic this season. Shortly after Christmas, *The New York Times*, for example, ran an op-ed by liberal evangelical preacher Jim Wallis, who chided that the Democrats running for president still weren't getting the issue right. He cited Howard Dean's admission, for one, that the former governor had quit being an Episcopalian to become a Congregationalist after the Episcopal diocese of Vermont refused to sell land for a lakeshore bike path. This struck Wallis

as just the sort of "faith-lite" story that too many Americans associate with Democrats and God—and a key reason why Democrats come off as so irreligious to many voters.

Wallis' editorial provoked a rash of letters to the *Times*—and must have prompted a conversation among the editors, because, less than two weeks later, they published an op-ed rejoinder of sorts, headlined "One Nation, Under Secularism." In it, former journalist Susan Jacoby warned darkly that "[i]n Campaign 2004, secularism has become a dirty word." Avoiding mention of Wallis by name, she, too, took aim at Dean—not for his bike-path-provoked conversion but for telling Iowa voters that he prayed daily. Jacoby called the admission "comically opportunistic." The Democrats, it seems, can't catch a break on this issue from anyone this year.

Bush, of course, shows no confusion of any kind about *his* God. It's the Democrats who take the beating—from conservatives, naturally, but as the Wallis and Jacoby pieces (and hundred of others in the past several months) indicate, from a surprising array of liberals with very different agendas. In a year when Iraq and the economy top the list of matters most important to voters, type the words "religion and Democratic presidential candidates" into Google; the bounty retrieved seems to run the highway all the way to heaven itself. Go search Lexis-Nexis and the same thing happens. Little of it is complimentary.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that religion is at play in American politics. Yet exactly which aspect of that vast subject is supposed to be up for grabs this year, why it's important, and what the Democratic candidates should be thinking or doing or saying about it (if anything) remains devilishly elusive.

But there's a bottom line here that some might find surprising: Yes, the right wing will carry on about the Democrats being the party of the godless, and the media will serve as its amplifier. But at the end of day, a sizeable percentage of religious Americans—the ones who tend not to make much noise or hanker for public demonstrations of devotion—will vote Democratic anyway.

This is not to say that Democrats still shouldn't think hard about what they're up against. Obviously the Iraq War and September 11 have played their unsettling roles here. As this unilateralist administration has charged headlong into not one but two wars—wars it's insisted aren't about Islam but about terrorism—it has convinced almost no one that's what it really means. After initial post-9-11 talk about the "crusade" America would lead against its satanic enemies, Bush

backtracked, and, ever since, he and his administration have meticulously sworn that they see a huge difference between “Islamic fundamentalists” (always bad, it seems—unlike, say, “Christian fundamentalists”) and “Islam” (good, especially when it’s the faith of key U.S. allies in the Middle East and Asia, not to mention a billion people on the planet and several hundred thousand Michigan voters). But that need to show tolerance and discernment after 9-11 eventually clashed with a new conflicting need: to stoke war fever over Iraq. And convincing Americans that invading Iraq was necessary has fed darker fears—44 percent, according to Pew polls, now think Islam itself promotes violence. Left alone, that sort of bias would constitute its own potential weapon of mass destruction in the days and years ahead.

Foreign policy isn’t the only source of political God talk nowadays. Bush’s almost daily invocation of the deity—brought up in relation to the war on terrorism, prison reform, the future of the family, gay marriage, or drug problems among pro athletes—has been the other visible force driving religion to the top of the news this season. Stealing a page from Ronald Reagan (though notably not from Bush *pere*), Bush *filis* has, rhetorically at least, made front-and-center faith a rallying cry in the GOP’s ongoing home-front holy war against the Democrats, as well as its guarantor of ultimate victory in the terrorism wars abroad.

Keenly aware that Republicans were once again grabbing the “faith thing” away from them, Democratic Party strategists this year, desperate to hold on to at least a competitive position on any issue they can, have urged their candidates to fight back, to make sure that voters know there’s more than a letter’s worth of difference between “G-O-D” and “G-O-P.” Yet as the criticisms of Dean from sacred and secular Democrats alike suggest, and as the failed campaign of Joe Lieberman only underscores, knowing what voters who practice a faith that isn’t hard-right evangelical want to hear about the faith issue is no easy trick.

It’s hard to start any discussion on religion and politics these days without someone pulling out the now familiar Gallup Poll data showing that for over half a century, more than 90 percent of Americans have said they believe in God. Somewhat more disquieting to some, America is also a “Christian” country—in Gallup’s terms, that is, of citizens’ professed religious identity (practice remains another matter), because that’s what more than 80 percent of Americans say they are. Yet given those astonishing levels of apparent homogeneity, after that, anything remotely approaching religious majoritarianism in America disappears—and is why these two majoritarian facts about faith have long mattered far less than one might think.

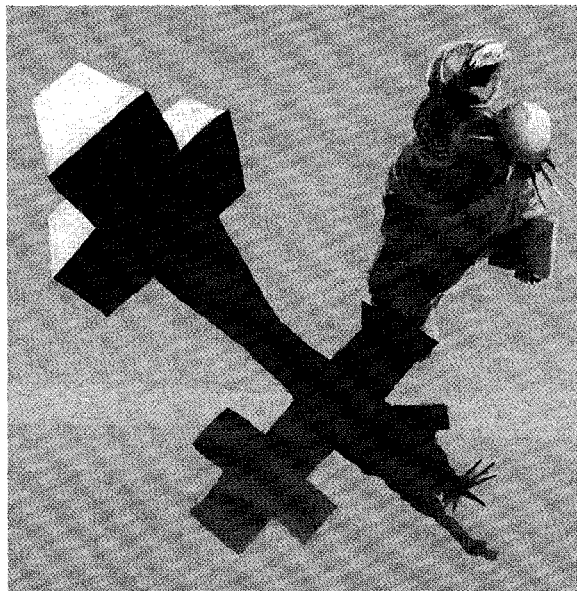
But then what *does* matter about religion in politics this presidential year? Here, as a starting place, are a few suggested themes worth thinking about:

1. The religious landscape does relate to voting behavior. There are three big denominational blocs in America, each representing roughly a quarter of the population: Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants, and evangelical (or fundamentalist or Pentecostal) Protestants. When it comes to politics, the first bloc leans Democratic, the second leans Republican, and the third is, simply, Republican—and proud of it. African-American Protestants are another 10 percent of the landscape, and while theologically evangelical, they’re clearly far more Democratic than white evangelicals are Republican. Seculars make up more or less another tenth, and vote 2 to 1 Democratic, while among the remaining 5 percent to 8 percent of Americans,

Mormons vote GOP, but Jews, other Christians, and other non-Christians all go Democratic. In 2000, Protestants made up 48 percent of Gore’s vote; Catholics, 23 percent; seculars, 19 percent; and Jews and others, 10 percent. Bush’s vote was 41 percent evangelical, 22 percent mainline Protestant, 21 percent Catholic, 11 percent secular, and 5 percent Jewish and others.

2. The geography of religion matters, but is not just about religion. Evangelicals have historically concentrated in the South, with smaller populations in the Midwest, and their location—no surprise—tracks remarkably closely nowadays to the states where the GOP has won heavily in recent years. In the Northeast, the Southwest, and parts of the Great Lakes Midwest, Roman Catholics are the biggest bloc in most places—and it’s been these states that Democratic presidential candidates most often win, especially when African-American Protestant turnout has also been strong and mainline Protestants have been persuaded to tilt Democratic along with them.

3. Where is the Christian right? For 20 years, first Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority and then Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition seemed everywhere, the scourge of liberals and liberal values, the embodiment of what the preachers bemoaned as “secular humanism.” Yet the fact (not always noticed at dinner parties when secular or religious liberals gather) is that the Moral Majority has been nonexistent for 15 years (after going bankrupt), and that the Christian Coalition is almost gone now. Robertson resigned as its leader three years ago, Ralph Reed (its Machiavelli or Richelieu, depending on your taste) left well before that, and 90 percent of what was once the coalition’s \$26 million budget has gone with them. Robertson and Falwell, of course, still show up regularly on cable TV with their fire-breathing attacks on



gays, feminists, and the general overall satanic perfidy of those whom they merely dislike. But it's not clear just who's paying serious attention to them. The Christian right exists now as a voting bloc within the Republican Party, but not as a successful separate group of extra-party organizations the two preachers can claim is still leading disillusioned southern Democrats to the promised conservative land.

4. The "compassionate conservative" conundrum of the GOP. All of Bush's warm-and-fuzzy "faith-based" talk was designed to pull moderates toward him in 2000. But then and since, it has also served double duty as a way to manage the religious-right bloc that's so essential to the GOP's future (that is, where the media hear the "compassionate" part, other ears delight at the second word). Yet the new "compassionate conservatism" also represents an admission of a core set of intermingled paradoxes facing the GOP this year and beyond.

By the late 1990s, after the collapse of both the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition, a surprising number of conservative evangelicals began openly questioning the full-bore politicization of their faith. They weren't less conservative, nor were they ready to jump the Republican ship. But as former Moral Majority Vice President Cal Thomas made clear in *Blinded by Might*, they felt badly used by Falwell, Robertson, and the GOP, which had never really delivered on the social issues that mattered most. Abortion was still legal, and twice as many were being performed as had been when *Roe v. Wade* was decided. Creationism wasn't making headway either, for all the ruckus they'd raised over it. After hundreds of school-board battles across the country, Kansas—the only state willing to put it in the curriculum—had reversed itself 18 months later. The school-prayer amendment drive, vigorous a decade earlier, was dead. And their ongoing, passionate campaign against gay rights—the latest in a long list of ultimately failed evangelical enterprises—was doing poorly, as legal, political, and social discrimination against homosexuals kept declining, even in the South.

Candidate Bush in 2000 had promised to reverse all that, even as he packaged himself for the rest of America in the language of compassion. But look what's happened: The White House's much-heralded effort in 2001 to launch a new faith-based social-welfare system has been long on heat and low on light. It quickly turned out that most evangelical congregations weren't really interested in taking government grants—and that their leaders were more concerned that competitors like the Nation of Islam or liberal Protestant groups never see a dime from the initiative.

The result? The original bill has been bottled up in Congress for nearly three years. And in the White House itself, Bush's whole faith-based initiative has gotten little save rhetorical attention ever since John DiIulio, the president's first appointee to run the program, resigned his post and ripped into the back-room deals and blatant cynicism he found among the "Mayberry Machiavellis" inside the White House. Meanwhile, Bush's unwillingness to make his much-touted (but still un-

funded) \$15 billion global AIDS initiative contingent on teaching abstinence has further enraged supporters.

Does this mean that the religious right inside the GOP is ready to bolt the party? Hardly—in part because they've nowhere else to go. Bush adviser Karl Rove swears he's doing a massive voter-turnout drive among Christian rightists, and of course their enmity toward all things Democratic and liberal will drive some of them to the polls to stop Satan's march.

But it does mean that there might yet be a "Dixiecan" revolt one day, akin to the 1948 "Dixiecrat" uprising led by Strom Thurmond that almost sank Harry Truman's re-election. And what about those Republican seculars who made up a crucial 10 percent of Bush's vote in 2000? How long will they choose to keep company with the demands that the religious right keeps placing on their shared party? Rove has no doubt been poring over the data on that critical question.

5. So where's the religious left to match the religious right? It's a good question, with far from simple answers. To

begin with, the fact that four out of five Gore voters in 2000 identified themselves as religious answers it—they're voting for the Democratic candidate. But that's not quite the whole story, obviously. In 1960, John F. Kennedy was a Catholic candidate in a Protestant country that had a 300-year history of distrust for "rum, Romanism, and rebellion." So to overcome his "Al Smith problem," he set out the modern marker for what it means to be a liberal politician.

Before a doubtful audience of ministers in

Houston, Kennedy declared that faith was a private matter, and that if elected he would not let his religion determine his presidential decisions.

It was a moment of triumph for secularism, it seemed, and for ecumenism—and it led to the election of the first non-Protestant president in U.S. history. But the aftereffects were more complex. While his election convinced most American elites that the country had entered what the great Yale historian of religion Sydney Ahlstrom called "the post-Protestant era," American voters didn't quite get the message. Kennedy won because more than 80 percent of Catholics voted for him, while a majority of Protestants opted for Richard Nixon. Twenty years later, by the time Ronald Reagan sought the same office, the conservative southern wing of America's evangelical Protestants had had enough of the Democrats who succeeded Kennedy and of claims that faith was "private"—and so began their now completed exodus to the GOP.

Still, for liberal candidates, there is an immense audience of "faithful" Democrats (and many independents) who aren't looking for a religious left to match the religious right. Unlike evangelicals, they don't feel compelled to use religious tests to guide their voting: Only a quarter of mainliners and a third of Catholics say they frequently or occasionally use faith to determine how to vote (compared with nearly 70 percent of white evangelicals).

The reasons for this are hardly new, unlike the triumph

JFK's Houston speech was a triumph for secularism and for ecumenism. But the effects were complex.

of private-faith or multicultural teaching. Well before the Civil War, the nation's largest Protestant denominations—the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians—split over two issues: slavery and whether to read the Bible literally. The northerners opted to move toward a “civic religion” that rejected slavery and embraced science, industrial progress, and modernism; their southern colleagues went the other way. That freed the northerners to gradually restructure their faith from a purely denominational construct to one that maintained denominational identity while promoting a civic, governmental ideal in which the state was meant to help achieve John Winthrop’s “City upon a Hill.” The Social Gospel movement in the 1880s and ’90s laid the groundwork for not only the Progressive Era but, soon enough, the New Deal as well. Tolerance, ecumenism, and multiculturalism (though a word of recent invention) were all foreseen then, more than a century ago. (Crucial to real ecumenism, American Catholics were embracing this view in the years just before Kennedy ran, and they accelerated their participation in light-year terms while Pope John XXIII was alive.)

Today, just as there always has been, a religious left is alive in America—easily seen in Martin Luther King Jr.’s legacy, in the Catholic bishops’ remarkable critiques of nuclear arms and economic injustice at the height of the Reagan era, in the ongoing battles over domestic issues such as the “living wage” campaigns being fought across the country today (often led by religious coalitions), and most recently in the Episcopal Church’s willingness to ordain an openly gay bishop.

But religious-left opposition is also divided within itself. For example, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which speaks for 60 million American Catholics, may find itself working alongside the National Council of Churches, which tries to speak for an almost equal number of more fractious progressive white and black Protestants (and Orthodox) on issues of economic justice or global security. Yet they part ways when it comes to the controversial God-and-body issues of abortion, homosexuality, birth control, and the like. No one has yet figured out how to heal those very real divisions.

Even so, innumerable Washington-based organizations defend and promote religious tolerance, and many speak from a clearly religious commitment. Secular groups such as People For the American Way and the American Civil Liberties Union actively cooperate with multid denominational religious allies like The Interfaith Alliance and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which, supported by hundreds of thousands of members, maintain a prominent profile in the nation’s capital. At the same time, the Catholic bishops and the National Council of Churches—and its member denominations—use their own well-staffed Capitol Hill offices to keep watchful eyes on issues from the impact of Bush’s tax cuts on the poor to the size of the defense budget to promoting alternatives to the administration’s unilateralist foreign policy.

The problem the religious left faces today, however, lies, ironically, in the crisis of modern Judaism, once the steadfast ally of these progressive Christians. Long distrustful of evangelical Christianity, a notable minority of American Jews—

thanks to evangelicals’ rereading of the Book of Revelation, a New Testament portion that most liberal Christians simply ignore—have begun flirting with an incongruous new alliance that’s eating away at the heart of the nation’s religious left. Stunningly, there’s been a transformation from evangelicals’ once commonplace anti-Semitism to a Semitophilic of an extraordinary sort. In their reading of Revelation, for example, evangelical “premillenarians” have taken the creation of modern Israel as a sign from God that Christ’s Second Coming—and with it, the Final Judgment—are now imminent. When that chiliastic moment arrives, though, Jews—like all nonbelievers in Christ’s redemptive role—don’t fare well in Revelation’s vision. But no matter. What this has produced is an unholy alliance of convenience, in which Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu have embraced the likes of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell as a means to win support for their policies, while for conservative evangelicals, a strong Israel is crucial to Revelation-inspired dreams. And for GOP strategists such as Ralph Reed and Karl Rove, it has meant the opportunity to coax Jewish support away from the Democrats—or at least toward support for a much more conservative Democratic Party less resistant to the GOP’s agenda.

As this complicated, fractious, and always messy landscape suggests, American religion can’t ever be fitted into boxes as neat as Himmelfarb’s “two cultures.” Alexis de Tocqueville, the old warhorse on religion and politics, gets trotted out often these days by conservatives who want to use him to support their version of American religiosity’s ongoing importance. But Tocqueville never claimed to see any such thing; far from it, he saw the same complicated, fractious, messy landscape we see today. “I even doubt whether religious opinions have as much influence as one at first thinks,” he wrote in a letter to a French friend. “The religious state of this people is perhaps the most curious thing ... it’s evident that here, generally speaking, religion does not profoundly stir the souls.”

What Tocqueville did see was that “the immense majority have faith in the wisdom and good sense of human kind, *faith* in the doctrine of human perfectibility. ... They honestly believe in the excellence of the government which rules them; they believe in the wisdom of the masses provided they are enlightened. ... Will Deism ever be able to satisfy all classes, especially those which most need the rein of religion? I can’t persuade myself of that. ... It’s obvious there still remains here a greater foundation of Christianity than in any other country of the world to my knowledge, and I don’t doubt but that this disposition still influences the political regime ... ”

Still, Tocqueville warned in conclusion, too much could be made of the whole topic. “That’s enough on this subject,” he ended his letter, “toward which my imagination draws me continuously and which would end by making me mad if I plumbed it often ... ” It’s advice still worth listening to today. ■

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The E-Word

No right-wing attack against Democrats is more electric than the charge of elitism. It can be buried, but that requires acknowledging the ways in which it has been—let's face it—true.

BY NICOLAUS MILLS

ONE OF THE MOST REVEALING PASSAGES IN THE late Paul Wellstone's political memoir, *The Conscience of a Liberal*, is his criticism of the decision that he made during his first year in the Senate to hold a press conference on his opposition to the Gulf War within sight of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. "I wanted to dramatize the dangers of military action," he wrote. "Instead, I deeply hurt many Vietnam veterans—really, all of the veterans' community."

What makes Wellstone's self-criticism so interesting a decade after the Gulf War is his refusal to excuse his decision. He does not justify his actions by arguing that he was right about the war, and he does not minimize what he did by saying that it was a lapse in etiquette. Wellstone understood that for Democratic liberals like himself to act in a way that showed indifference to others (in this case, an indifference that allowed him to use a war memorial as a media prop and ignore the sacrifice it symbolized) was serious. It left them vulnerable to the accusation that they were elitists who stood for an ideologically driven politics in which the feelings and values of ordinary people were unimportant.

Today, Wellstone's concerns about the dangers of elitism are, if anything, more relevant than they were when the first George Bush was president. In a period in which an estimated 3.3 million white-collar jobs are slated to move overseas by 2015 and at least 31 percent of the Republican tax cuts will go to the richest 1 percent of the country, Democrats still face difficulty in making political headway on these issues. Often they find themselves spending their time responding to the charge that they constitute a liberal elite out of touch with mainstream America.

What has made this elitism charge so formidable—and in many ways as effective as the "soft on communism" label that hurt Democrats during the Cold War years—is the opening it has created for opponents to make the kinds of lifestyle and personal-choice issues that work against Democrats an increasingly important part of our national political debate.

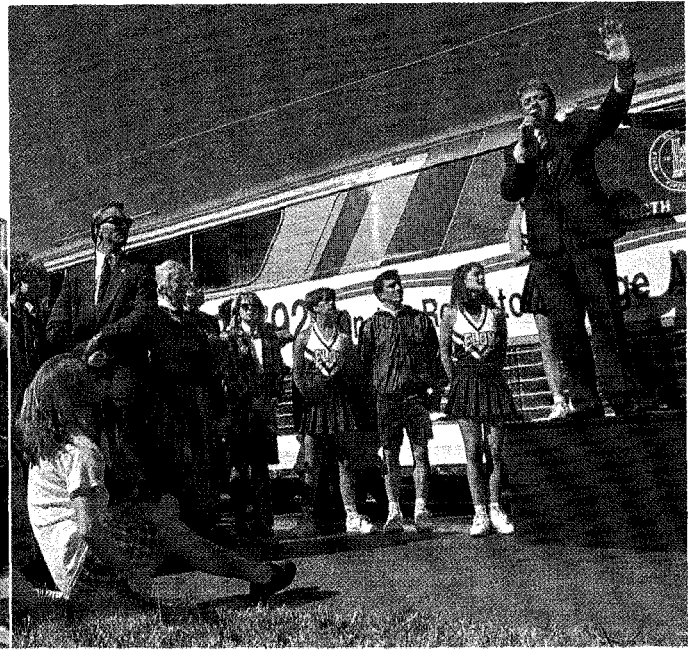
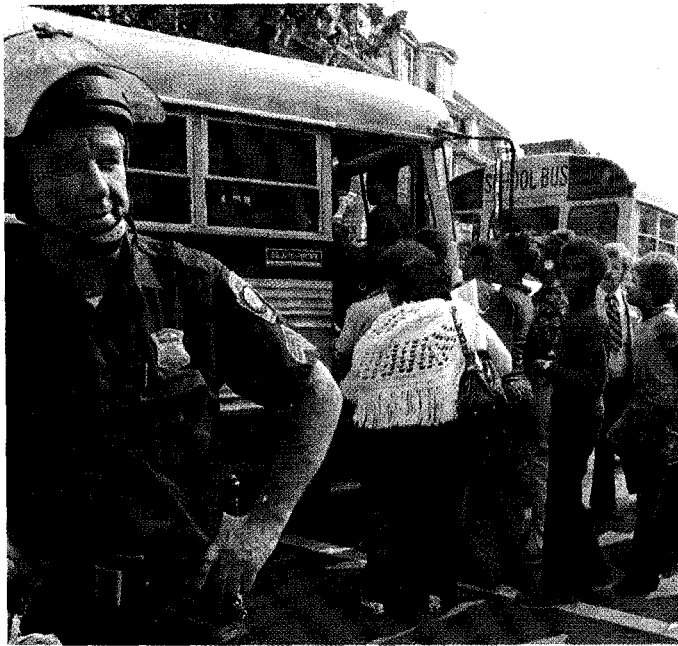
Fifty-four percent of Americans disapprove of the president's handling of the economy, but Democratic liberals find that they cannot campaign by just talking about job loss and health care. Voters also want to hear from them on when they go to church and how they view marriage and what their definition of patriotism is. As a frustrated Howard Dean observed last November during a visit to Tallahassee, Florida, "We have got to stop having our elections in the South based on race, guns, God, and gays and start having them based on

jobs and health insurance and a foreign policy that's consistent with American values."

For a party that has thrived on making fairness and equality its goals since the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt, this shift in the national sensibility has been a terrible setback. In the old days, it was the corporate and military establishment that C. Wright Mills wrote about in his 1956 classic, *The Power Elite*, who were viewed as ruling the country and against whom Democratic liberals could run. These days, for a large number of voters, the establishment looks altogether different. In their eyes, the new power elite consists of those whom David Brooks, in his 2000 best-seller, *Bobos in Paradise*, defined as a highly educated bourgeois bohemian ruling class (Bobos) who blend 1960s rebellion with 1980s achievement.

Framing this shift in political and cultural perception is the growing identification of groups that can be won over to a candidate on the basis of appeals to their lifestyle or personal choices. "NASCAR dads," a term coined by Democratic pollster Celinda Lake to describe the estimated 75 million fans of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, are a case in point. Blue-collar workers with jobs that average between \$35,000 and \$65,000 a year, NASCAR dads should be loyal Democratic voters on the basis of their economic self-interest, but they have proved staunch Republican supporters, giving President Bush a 61-percent approval rating.

A similar pro-Republican, anti-liberal Democratic bias exists among churchgoers. A recent poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press showed that those who frequently attend religious services favor Bush by a 63-to-37 margin, while those who never attend religious services lean toward Democrats by a 62-to-38 margin. As Thomas Mann, a researcher at the Brookings Institution in Washington noted, these days religion is "the most powerful predictor" of "partisan voting intention." What has been especially damaging to Democratic liberals in recent years is not, however, simply the identification of groups within the country who are prepared to let their cultural and personal beliefs, rather than their economic self-interest, determine their voting. It has been the ability of radio and television commentators, intensely hostile to liberalism, to make sure the most conservative of these beliefs get widespread circulation. The best-known talk-show hosts doing this—Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity, Pat Robertson—enjoy a high level of celebrity, and their views have gained wide attention through a series of books (some of which they have written) that continue the war against liberal elitism.



Bus Journey: The Boston busing crisis opened wounds that Clinton's rhetoric and policies helped heal. Where do today's Democrats fit?

The books—particularly such recent ones as Ann Coulter's *Slander*, Bernard Goldberg's *Arrogance*, Laura Ingraham's *Shut Up and Sing*, and Michael Savage's *The Enemy Within*—come with snappy titles, a picture of the author on the cover, and the argument, made over and over, that the contempt of the elites, especially the liberal elites, for ordinary Americans is infinite. As Ingraham wrote, "They think we're stupid. They think our patriotism is stupid. They think our church-going is stupid. They think our flag-flying is stupid."

What these books—by authors who nowhere else in their public lives are concerned with those on the bottom rung of society—do from start to finish is push the argument that the influence of the liberal elites is everywhere in our culture. All one needs to do is to look at the subtitles: *Liberal Lies About the American Right*; *Rescuing America from the Media Elite*; *How Elites from Hollywood, Politics, and the UN Are Subverting America*; *Saving America from the Liberal Assault on our Schools, Faith, and Military*.

The books by the writers on the left who have sought, largely unaided by the bulk sales that catapult the right-wing books onto the best-seller lists, to counter this conservative assault—Eric Alterman's *What Liberal Media?*, Joe Conason's *Big Lies*, Al Franken's *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them*, and Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men*—have slowed it only partially. That is hardly surprising. The assault on liberal elites that we see now has been a long time developing. Rather than catching voters by surprise, it has a familiar ring to it.

The roots of the assault were described in 1969 by Kevin Phillips in his breakthrough study, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, which he dedicated to President Richard Nixon and Attorney General John Mitchell. Phillips argued that the combined votes for Nixon and George Wallace, along with the Democrats' liberal stand on civil rights, the welfare state,

and the flag, provided the basis for a political and cultural realignment that would make Democrats the minority party for the foreseeable future.

Nixon exploited this situation by characterizing his supporters as a "silent majority" bullied by the liberal anti-war left, and his vice president, Spiro Agnew, went still further, describing the liberal journalists and intellectuals who opposed the Nixon administration as "an effete corps of impudent snobs." Nixon's overwhelming defeat of George McGovern in 1972 validated the effectiveness of this strategy, and in the 1980s the Republican attack on liberal elites was continued by Ronald Reagan, through his alliance with the religious right and the Moral Majority, and by George Bush Senior, who portrayed his 1988 Democratic opponent, Michael Dukakis, as someone so out of touch with America that he could be mocked for representing the liberal views of the "Harvard boutique." Dan Quayle, Bush's vice president, later observed that, by the 1990s, there were "two Americas," "the cultural elite and the rest of us."

It's tempting to dismiss these criticisms as divisive pandering and simply ignore them. But it would be a mistake to think that the elitism charge has stuck simply because the Democrats have been victimized by their conservative opponents and a changing society. Since the 1960s, Democratic liberals have also put themselves in a position to be seen as elitists. On the great wedge issues of the last 40 years—Vietnam, school busing, law and order—Democratic liberals, acting on the basis of deeply held convictions, have backed policies for which the highest costs have not been born by an educated middle class living in suburbs and safe city neighborhoods but by poor and working-class families, who have had to take whatever came their way.

While the Vietnam War protests were going on, it was mostly the sons of the wealthy and the middle class, not those

LIBERALS AND VALUES

of the poor and working class, who escaped the draft by staying in college or hiring lawyers to argue that they were entitled to a medical deferment. During the school-busing crisis of the 1970s, it was poor black and white students, not suburban and private-school students, who experienced the disruptions that occurred when their overcrowded schools were rocked by racial turmoil. And when law and order were enforced less strictly ("defining deviancy down," Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan would call it), those for whom unsafe streets were daily realities, not those in well-run communities, were the people who felt the consequences.

This is not to say that Democratic liberals were wrong in opposing the war in Vietnam, working to desegregate the public schools, or, in the case of the law-and-order issue, trying to curb the excesses of police departments. But it is to say that Democratic liberals never collectively dealt with how the privileged lives they led generally immunized them from the sacrifice and disruption that followed when their political principles were put into action.

In 1975, six months after the fall of Saigon, the editor and writer James Fallows published a searing essay in *The Atlantic Monthly*, "What Did You Do in the Class War,

pear to be hostile to people of faith or people who own guns, they will believe the Democrats don't understand people like us." Since that time, the Democratic presidential candidates' public disavowals of elitism have been continuous, from Joe Lieberman's insistence that "money and influence must not drown out the voice and the values of ordinary Americans" to John Edwards' declaration, "I do believe that it's important for us as a party not to look down on anybody, not to stereotype those in different parts of the country. We can't be a party of elitism."

This language, even when coupled with talk of the nation being divided into two Americas, will not be enough. Given the importance that issues of morality and values have come to have in our elections, Democrats need to go further. They cannot succeed in 2004 if they pin all their hopes on the solutions they offer to such key economic problems as the nearly 3.2 million jobs that have been lost since George W. Bush became president or the rising number of Americans (around 44 million by current estimates) without health insurance. If they want to become a majority party in the post-September 11 world, Democrats are going to have to develop a more far-reaching politics—specifically, a politics of security that ad-

Liberals weren't wrong to oppose Vietnam, desegregate schools, or curb police excess. But they never collectively dealt with some of the disruptions that followed.

Daddy?" in which he told the story of how he and most of his Harvard classmates schemed to avoid the draft, believing that in doing so they were clogging the great American war machine. But what they had really done, Fallows concluded, was very different. They had opposed going to Vietnam in "a bloodless, theoretical fashion" and guaranteed that "our class of people would be spared the real cost of the war." Fallows' essay is the model for the kind of public acknowledgment of past history that Democratic liberals today need to make if they are ever to put the charge of elitism fully behind them.

In the 1990s, Bill Clinton cracked open the door for such an acknowledgement of the past. He steered clear of the social policies that, by the end of the 1970s, had cost Democrats so many of their traditional supporters, and he defused the argument that liberal elites were indifferent to the working class. Clinton got his party out from under the burden of the welfare issue, and in language that harkened back to Franklin Roosevelt's concern for the "forgotten man," Clinton made the central figure of his 1992 campaign "those who do the work, pay the taxes, raise the kids, and play by the rules."

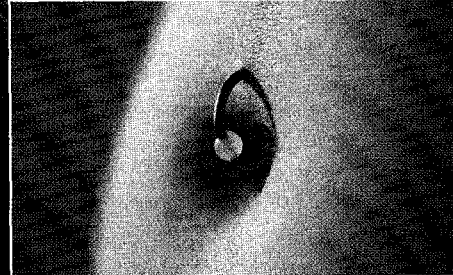
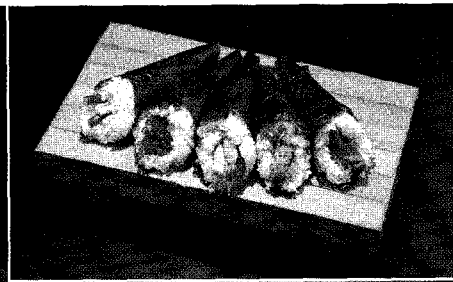
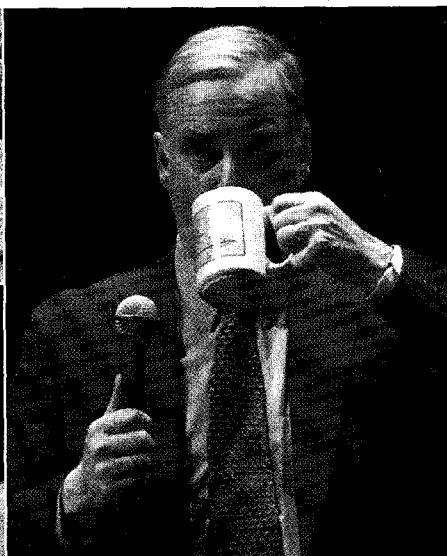
Today's Democrats have been very hesitant to extend Clinton's legacy on elitism, save in murmurs. With a few notable exceptions, they have concentrated on dealing with the elitism charge rhetorically, denying that they are elitists while refusing to explore in detail the most serious components of the charge. Indiana Senator Evan Bayh took this route last October when he told the press, "The Democratic Party can't afford to be perceived as cultural elitists. If we ap-

dresses the full spectrum of well-earned fears that the country has about terrorism, about unemployment, about access to a doctor, about living in a time of increasing uncertainty.

The good news is that if they are able to convince voters that they can act on such a linkage, that they grasp its psychological, social, and economic dimensions, it will not matter how many best-sellers the right wing produces. The elitism charge will simply be written off as name-calling. Democrats will be making the kinds of connections that Bush never has, and they will be acquiring wedge issues of their own that they can use against an administration whose repeated favors for corporate donors and the very richest Americans make it supremely vulnerable to arguments built around fairness and vision. On national-security matters, there is the Bush administration's rhetoric about the war on terrorism but its refusal to ask Americans (save those in the armed services) to sacrifice as Americans traditionally have when threatened by war. On the domestic front, there is the administration's talk about prosperity but its acceptance of the Marie Antoinette thinking of Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, who, in defense of high-tech job outsourcing, declared earlier this year, "There is no job that is America's God-given right anymore."

Political ammunition does not get much better than this. ■

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You Know You're a Liberal When ...

Speech Impediments

After two decades spent trying to change the subject, Democrats finally seem to understand that they need to speak a language of values. A good first step: figuring out what they are.

BY GEOFFREY NUNBERG

FOR A LESSON IN HOW THE RIGHT USES LANGUAGE to shape political perceptions, consider the television ad that the archconservative Club for Growth ran during the Iowa caucuses. An announcer asks a middle-aged couple leaving a barbershop what they think of "Howard Dean's plans to raise taxes on families by \$1,900 a year." The man responds, "I think Howard Dean should take his tax-hiking, government-expanding, latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, *New York Times*-reading ..."—and then his wife picks up the litany—"... body-piercing, Hollywood-loving, left-wing freak show back to Vermont, where it belongs."

That picture of liberals is a deliberate demographic hodgepodge, of course—you picture Marilyn Manson on the porch of his house in Rutland, TiVo-ing *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and laughing so hard at Maureen Dowd's column that he almost chokes on his *unagi* cone. But the ad succinctly summarized the jumble of attributes that the right has assigned to liberals over the years in an effort to brand them as pretentious, effete, elitist, or deviant creatures outside of the cultural mainstream.

Even the syntax contributes to the effect. Object-verb compounds like "Volvo-driving" and the related "Volvo driver" have been a fixture in the conservative lexicon since the onset of the culture wars in the 1970s, when the right began to cast liberals as flag-burning, bra-burning, pot-smoking, draft-dodging, America-hating, lip-curling, card-carrying do-gooders. That's the syntactic form we use to construct an

adjective out of an activity—it turns what people do into a name for what they are.

It's true that liberals sometimes use expressions like "flag-waving" or "truck-driving" to describe the other side, but rarely for public consumption. As Howard Dean learned from the flap over his remark about pickup trucks and Confederate flags, liberals can get in trouble when they speak too candidly in public about the social demographics of their constituencies. (As it happens, "redneck" appears a lot less frequently in the liberal press than in the conservative weeklies, which are fond of putting it into the mouths of imaginary left-wing elitists.) In their public denunciations of the right, liberals tend to favor other types of compounds—items like "narrow-minded," "hard-hearted," and "mean-spirited," which reproach people not for the activities they engage in but for character traits like a lack of social conscience.

Those patterns mirror a basic distinction. The modern right tries to define the fundamental political identities around cultural norms of behavior—what you buy, what you wear, what you read, what you stick in your body (and where). For the left, the lines are drawn along attitudes about civic responsibility and social justice.

You can hear the distinction in two recent slogans. After Vermont passed its civil-unions law in 2000, lawns and bumpers began to bristle with signs that said, "Take Back Vermont," with the understood continuation "... from deviants and Saab-

driving flatlanders" (real Yankees drive Subarus). But when Dean appropriated that formula for his presidential campaign as "Take Back America," the implicit division was between decent working people and the greedy special interests. It reminds you that there are "two Americas"—their "them" isn't the same as our "us," and vice versa.

It's tempting to attribute all this to a clash of moral systems—between the daddy party and the mommy party, or, more thoughtfully, between "strict father" and "nurturant parent" models of morality that George Lakoff describes in his *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. But while red-state and blue-state voters have obvious differences over domestic morality, there's a danger in taking "liberal" and "conservative" as basic human types whose political, cultural, and moral attitudes all flow from a single cognitive mechanism. In its crude form, that's exactly the implication of the descriptions in that Club for Growth ad—the idea that liberals' enthusiasm for overtaxation is just a reflex of the same sensibilities that draw them to raw fish and noncanonical body ornament. It's all part of a calculated effort to talk about liberals and conservatives as if they were incommensurable political genders, with a we're-from-Mars-and-they're-from-Venus roll of the eyes.

MORALS AND MORALITY

The essential difference between the sides isn't in the distinct moral universes they inhabit but in the kinds of moral values they take as defining political community. Yet in recent years, liberals have had what E.J. Dionne describes as "an allergy to invoking moral language to talk about public policy." Liberals may appeal to traditional Democratic themes like fairness, but they've been skittish about using terms like "morality" or "values." That's partly because of a diffidence about making displays of religiosity. But it's also a tacit acknowledgment that moral language has been invested with narrowly partisan meanings that make liberals uncomfortable.

The tendency is most subtly at work in the altered meaning of the word "values," which has become the exclusive property of the right. In discussions of American politics in major newspapers, references to "conservative values" are more than six times as frequent as references to "liberal values."

Ostensibly, values are a matter of moral judgments, but in political discourse the word is both narrower and broader than that. Like the "moral" of "moral majority," it's chiefly a matter of standards of domestic behavior rather than social commitments—of morals rather than morality. When Peter Jennings challenged Howard Dean during the New Hampshire debate to defend himself against the charge that he doesn't share "mainstream values," nobody took him as alluding to the minimum wage or health care—it's a matter of attitudes about "God, guns, and gays," many of them cultural predilections that are "moral" only in the loosest sense of the word. (No one cites Scripture to justify keeping the gun-show loophole.)

It's hard to imagine a reporter asking a Republican candidate the same question, not because of any partisan bias in the media but simply because it's the Republicans who have defined which kinds of attitudes count as "mainstream values" in the first place. It's a term designed to put liberals on the defensive by blurring the distinctions among mores, morals, and morality. You can hear that contradiction between the cultural and ethical meanings of the word in Nathan Lane's line in the movie *Win a Date with Tad Hamilton*, in which he plays a Hollywood agent trying to persuade a debauched movie star to dump the small-town West Virginia girl he's smitten with. "Your values are different," Lane's character says. "For instance, she has them."

RECOVERING OUR VALUES

Lately, though, Democrats have begun to realize that they needn't concede the language of morality and values to the right. As Dionne observes, "Not long ago, a politician who used the word 'moral' was about to talk about 'permissiveness' and 'cultural decline.' But the new 'moral majority' being forged on the campaign trail is built on a yearning for community and a promise of social justice."

John Kerry says that America has a "broken value system" and calls on the president to occupy "the moral high ground." Joe Lieberman calls the failure to provide health insurance to 43 million Americans "morally scandalous." And Howard Dean says "this president has turned a blind eye to morality. We have lost our moral compass." John Edwards, meanwhile, reminds people that

Americans have a "moral responsibility" to eliminate poverty.

"Values"—along with items like "alienation," "juvenile delinquency," and "prejudice"—first entered the general vocabulary as a social-science term popular in progressive circles in the postwar years. When the right began to appropriate the word in the late 1960s, it was a deliberate effort to counter the moral fervor of the anti-war movement by depicting its adherents as out of step with mainstream America. The earliest *New York Times* citation for "mainstream values" occurs in a 1968 article headlined "Political Activism New Hippie 'Thing,'" and a few years later the Republicans were describing George McGovern as the candidate of "acid, amnesty, and abortion." By 1988, George Bush Senior could make "mainstream values" a literal mantra of his campaign: "I represent the mainstream, the mainstream views, and the mainstream values. And they are your values, and my values, and the values of the vast majority of the American people."

That pattern of co-option shows up over and over again in the recent history of political language. "Empowerment," "diversity," "inclusiveness," "color blindness," "bias"—those terms all began their lives on the left and then were redeployed by the right in new contexts, in the hope that the words' original moral valence would stick to them. It's the same strategy that marketers use when they attach once-lustrous brand

**"Values" first entered
the general lexicon as
a social-science term
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in the postwar years.**

names like KitchenAid, Lancia, and Abercrombie & Fitch to downscale product lines.

Listen to President Bush asking Congress to pass a faith-based initiative program, “so people of faith can know that the law will never discriminate against them again.” The same logic would let you argue, with some justification, that the First Amendment discriminates against establishments of religion. But no one would have thought to put the point in those terms before “discrimination” in all its forms became an unequivocal social evil.

The appropriations can get pretty shameless, as when Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie charged Dick Gephardt with “hate speech” for calling President Bush a “miserable failure.” But all of this is a backhanded tribute to the moral appeal of progressives’ language. Conservatives concede as much when they acknowledge the need to describe themselves as “compassionate,” or when they depict liberals as preening moralizers with labels like “sanctimonious,” a word that the press applies to liberals far more often than to conservatives.

GETTING THE ’60S RIGHT

In a sense, the Republicans’ efforts to keep ’60s idealism at bay have also served to keep its memory alive. So it seems natural that the Democrats’ new embrace of moral language should be coupled with invocations of the moral ardency of that period. The anti-war movement was the defining experience in John Kerry’s personal history. Howard Dean recalls the America in which he came of age; he speaks movingly of the hopefulness of that moment, and the achievements of Medicare, Head Start, and the Voting Rights Act—a moment when “we were all in it together.” John Edwards, meanwhile, repeatedly decries “the scourge of poverty,” a word that has been in eclipse since the perceived failure of Great Society programs led people to disaggregate it into less emotionally charged components. (Over the past 20 years or so, America hasn’t had a poverty problem, just a literacy problem, a welfare problem, an affordable-health-care problem, an inner-city-schools problem, and an Internet-access problem.)

Americans are likely to be receptive to the Democrats’ new tone. Despite the right’s appropriation of the “values” issue, a CBS News poll last November showed that voters were evenly divided as to which party came closer to sharing their moral views. And the excesses of the ’60s movements with which Republicans used to frighten voters have largely faded into irrelevancy. The legions of young anti-war activists who have energized the Democratic base don’t evoke the same disquieting associations that the hippies did in 1968. (Getting “Clean for Dean” is a lot less of a tonsorial challenge than getting “Clean for Gene” was in 1968, when Sam Brown was charged with tidying up the longhaired activists who flocked to New Hampshire to join the McCarthy campaign. Besides, the nerdy grunge look that the current activists favor isn’t exactly alien to the American heartland nowadays.) And over the past six months, reservations about the administration’s Iraq policy have become entirely mainstream, as events start to call up other retro ’60s expressions like

“hearts and minds” and “the light at the end of the tunnel.”

Predictably, Republicans will also counter the Democrats’ vision of two Americas with the familiar incantations of “class warfare” and the politics of “envy,” terms that William Safire trotted out in a recent column on Ted Kennedy’s influence in Kerry’s campaign. Track the frequency of “class warfare” in the press and you find it spiking whenever Democrats raise objections to a Republican power grab: at the height of the Gingrich revolution in 1995; in the summer of 2000, when Al Gore adopted a more populist rhetoric after his nomination; and when Republicans were putting through their tax cut at the beginning of 2003.

That has been an effective rhetorical strategy in the past—“class warfare” is a phrase that usually sets Americans to looking over their shoulders. But this time around, the phrase isn’t likely to neutralize middle-class anxieties about job loss, health-care costs, and education. Even with the stock market’s comeback, people are no longer disposed to believe that growing disparities in income are a tribute to the industry of entrepreneurs or the genius of the free-market system, rather than to greed and cronyism. (A Harris poll last October showed that only 35 percent of respondents agreed that “people on Wall Street are as honest and moral as other people.”)

Recapturing the language of morality is the most important single step in refashioning a new progressive rhetoric, one free of the technocratic jargon for which Democrats have had a lamentable penchant in the past. (Phrases like “unfunded mandates” and “single payer” may be accurate, but at the cost of coming across as opaque to the Great Unwonky who make up most of the electorate.) As Lieberman put it, “If we just get programmatic and bureaucratic ... we’re not using a language people use every day.”

Finding “the language that people use every day” is the crucial step in redefining words like “morality” and “values” to include everyday ideas of fairness and decency. The next time a Democratic presidential candidate is asked to assuage fears that he “doesn’t share mainstream values,” he might answer by pointing out that such values also include “a fair day’s pay for a day’s work,” “many hands make light work” (particularly in the war on terrorism), and “pick up after yourself,” a reasonable response to the administration’s rollbacks of environmental protections.

That kind of commonsense, tough-minded moral talk goes a lot further toward dispelling those wimpy liberal stereotypes than conspicuous attendance at NASCAR events. Properly framed, progressive ideals should be compelling even to God-fearing, pickup-driving, longneck-guzzling, flag-waving, job-seeking, mortgage-paying, and condescension-wary red-state voters. They know as much as anyone how the deck has been stacked in recent years, and they have as much of a feeling for what decency and fairness require of a nation, whether they think of it as a question of “values” or simply of the idea that no man liveth unto himself. ■

GEOFFREY NUNBERG is a linguist at Stanford University. A new collection of his writings about language, *Going Nuclear*, will appear in May from Public Affairs.

The New Case for Marriage

The first wave of feminism looked upon marriage with suspicion. But the institution has changed (partly *because of feminism*). So the point now is to embrace it for everyone.

BY MARGARET MORGANROTH GULLETTE

MARRIAGE IS UNDENIABLY A CHANGED INSTITUTION, because wedlock is no longer obligatory on the old patriarchal terms. For women this has been a hard-won, historic victory. Divorce became easier starting with the first wave of feminism in the early 1900s, and the second wave, beginning in the 1960s, obtained for women more kinds of work, better salaries, new legal rights, heightened self-esteem, and the acceptability of sexuality outside of marriage.

All this empowered some to leave bad marriages or to never marry at all. It helped inspire a lesbian liberation movement and, for a while, a polemic about the reform or abolition of marriage. Many women I knew in long-term relationships with men refused to marry; if someone mentioned “your husband,” they got huffy. Romance was suspect. Breaking the old link between the horse and carriage became a cause. But now that angry polemic seems to have dissipated, like smoke from extinguished flames, very quietly.

Yet heterosexual marriage, and the gender divisions it seems to promote, is by no means entirely revolutionized. Indeed, with “welfare reform” and its penalizing of single mothers, pressure on “deadbeat dads,” and the Bush administration’s heterosexual-marriage promotions, the U.S. government tries to force women and men back into traditional matrimony. What needs explaining is why, under such circumstances, women of various ages and sexualities are finding more to say in defense of marriage—and why some feminists, like me, are even fighting for it.

WHAT TRANSFORMED ME FROM A REBELLIOUS critic of the institution into a vocal and explicit advocate had little to do with my private life in the new feminist era, although I have maintained a married, heterosexual relationship for 39 years. The impetus came from my recognizing and honoring the growing desire of some of my lesbian friends and relatives to enjoy the protections that marriage now extends only to heterosexuals.

For a long time I did not know how many legal benefits there were, so obsessed was I by the one whopper advantage that the law meant to deny me. When my husband and I first bought a house together, I almost lost the chance to co-own it because the default contract in Massachusetts gave it to the husband. I discovered this automatic male privilege only by chance at the closing, and the risk that I might have lost my share in case of divorce reverberated over the years and started me, like thousands of others, on the road to becoming

a critic of marriage law. (That law changed soon after.)

Then one day over lunch, a friend made a shocking list of the benefits that “straight marrieds” like me automatically get and do not appreciate—which she could not get and would have valued properly. She hurled them forth almost as if they were my fault. Spousal and child support. Joint tax benefits. Joint property ownership. Her midlife list emphasized medical and bereavement leave, and the right to inherit a spouse’s pension. Her rage at the system—or maybe at my insouciant ignorance—was simply overflowing. Her list was dramatically long, and could have been a lot longer still. According to the Freedom to Marry Coalition of Massachusetts, marriage provides more than a thousand legal rights and responsibilities to heterosexuals.

A few years later, a niece of mine who had exchanged pretty gold rings with her female partner in a private ceremony became a mother when her partner gave birth to twins. My niece had to adopt her children to become their legal guardian. (My husband would not have had to do that if I had been artificially inseminated.) In detail, the whole despicable indictment became clear to me. If my niece had lived in another state, she might have been unable to adopt. Even the child-free can despair at not having the right to marry. Absent marriage, one partner’s day-care, health-care, and survivor benefits may not come to the other. If one becomes gravely ill, the other cannot automatically visit her in the hospital, make medical decisions on her behalf, qualify for family leave, care for her at home, or honor her last wishes if legal kin oppose it. All the love and commitment freely given over any number of years can be rendered null. Gay and lesbian partners already have the pure relationship that feminists said we wanted—without wedlock—and they want wedlock.

Apart from the legal rights, the fact that lesbian women and gay men invent commitment ceremonies suggests that some want the intangible benefits of a public wedding: the joyous celebration, the approving social notice, the community’s support for their loving sharing of past, present, and future—and sometimes the sanctification of a religious ceremony. Even if both women (or both men) were to wear white, it would seem pointless to argue now—as some used to, decades ago—that this is an imitation of the worst of patriarchy.

In Massachusetts, the state Supreme Court recently voted in a landmark decision that gays and lesbians have an equal-protection right to marriage; the legislature is still trying to circumvent the ruling. I will go on writing to the leadership, speaking as a heterosexual married woman, about the relief

from misery that legal marriage could bring to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender couples. In Massachusetts, it will raise the cultural value of same-sex love and sexuality by equating those who match with the favored model—as homophobic opponents well know. Even before the court ruling, more than 50 percent of Massachusetts residents said they supported same-sex marriage.

This new civil-rights movement has changed progressive attitudes toward state-sponsored marriage. It's clear that nothing less than "marriage" will do. Otherwise, in a country that George W. Bush's Christians often seem to be leading, some rights are likely to be missing. Too many painful and practical questions ride on lawful matrimony. Once my niece, too, can choose to become an old married lady with all the thousand rights I have, I'll have the leisure to take up utopian critiques of marriage again.

NOW THAT HETEROSEXUAL women have more alternatives—legal, sexual, economic, sociological, psychological—we can vote for or against marriage with our unshackled feet. Staying in a marriage has come closer to being an existential decision. You repeat it, as it were, annually.

I have stayed put in mine for a long time. But I need not accuse myself of inertia for this, or of having been bought, or of putting up with insult—all the distasteful reasons that honest women would have had to take into account in earlier millennia. I married so long ago, measured in feminist light years, that I exuberantly labeled my book boxes, sent from my grad-school apartment to our new home, "From Margaret Morganroth" in the upper left-hand corner, and, in the middle, "To Mrs. David Gullette." I did this while considering myself an advanced woman, a critic of historic marital arrangements. My mother had worked and had kept her own checkbook separately from my father's. I had earned a master's degree and planned to get a doctorate and be economically independent. I meant for us to be equals, and David did, too. From the beginning, we shared housework. Another couple we knew had compiled a list, prominently affixed to the refrigerator, of who did each miniscule chore, but we felt that we could handle the division of labor without rigid rules.

It was only when we had a child that I found myself in what I call the "Equality Wars." One example: At some point I noticed that while I made breakfast for us all, David was reading *The Boston Globe*. When I sat down, he didn't offer to share it: Every day I had to ask, and then he would absentmindedly hand me the second section. I stoked that anger day by day until it exploded. To him behaviors such as the

Globe episode seemed like little things. To me, too, my fury seemed disproportionate, and I could see it scared him. But there were days and nights when I hated him for turning me into a "wife," the subordinate I had sworn never to be. A hundred times I was ready to walk out. Instead I would say what needed to be said disdainfully. I used our anniversary celebrations in part to critique the state of our marriage.

Some of my friends were in support groups in the 1970s, working collectively through their own Equality Wars. Up in Boston, though, I was alone, fighting blindly with fists and nails, not entirely against him-as-husband but, had I only known, against patriarchy itself. I fought for David's fuller attention, for our son to respect me equally, for equal amounts of leisure time—for my very selfhood. But (and this is a long story for another time) as the women's movement

spread broadly into the lives of couples we knew and influenced some friends who then divorced their husbands, and as I became firmer and calmer about what was at stake, and as David continued to teach in a women's college undergoing its own gender-consciousness-raising, he became more pro-feminist in theory and practice.

Now those angry War years are behind us. My grievances against male privilege, my young husband's fears, his repetition of his father's habits of superiority, my repetition of my mother's angry resistances, all our passionate mistakes—can be told, as relics of our prehistory. I'm in



the marriage now for the pure relationship. The issues concern gender less and less. They come from different dimensions: privacy versus intimacy, professional rivalries, co-parenting an adult child. I had once imagined that marriage involved only such interesting problems. And because of various lucky breaks aside from the successes of feminism—like the closer convergence of our activism—our marriage eventually turned out close to the way I had once dreamed marriage could be, but better (because before feminism I could not have had such a good dream).

Even reported in such an abbreviated fashion, an autobiography like mine can cast a useful light on decades of unnoticed continuity through change. It is one true history of the nearly 50 percent of straight marriages that survive. But my point is this: Single heterosexual feminists my age, working women with adequate incomes, often want matrimony once they have found a man they like living with. I went to two such weddings just last year.

My divorced friends who remarry do not do so to obtain economic support. One says she wanted to confer her company's health benefits on the man she had long been living with. (If sharing finances or adult children is too compli-

cated, many older retired couples don't tie the knot.) Customs have changed: One husband I know, for example, does all the shopping and cooking. It doesn't occur to these women today to be afraid of being bullied; at midlife they feel able to take care of themselves, thank you very much. The principled objections seem to have disappeared along with the polemic. It is possible to be grateful for marriage as an evolving institution that doesn't oppress us.

Why do those remarrying bother? Each one would have a different story. But if there were a movement afoot to abol-

ish heterosexual marriage and it succeeded (leaving state-sponsored support for the needy in place), a feminist who remained through love in the no longer legally constituted relationship might feel that something was lost in the span of available feelings and meanings. I, for one, dislike both the chipper term "companion" and the formal "life partner." Like my niece, I like having a fixed starting date in order to be able to say "39 years" meaningfully. I think people who want a little sentimentality deserve access to it. Like various lesbian and gay friends, I enjoy the resonant language of the past,

Queer and Present Danger?

BY ROBERT KUTTNER

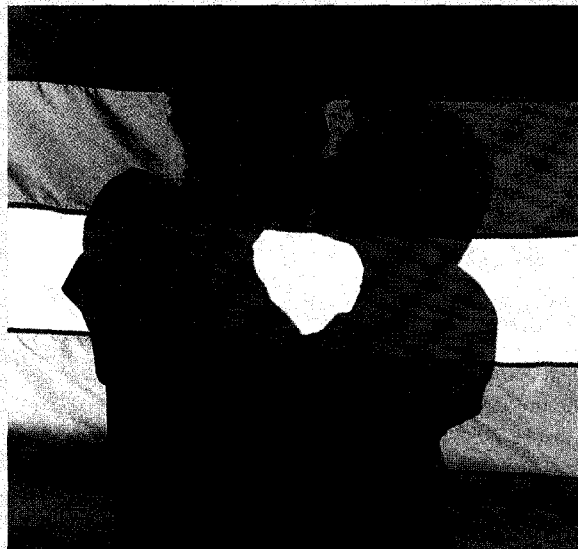
On May 17, gays and lesbians in Massachusetts will gain the right to marry, thanks to a 4-3 ruling by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. In July, the Democratic presidential nominee, presumably John Kerry of Massachusetts, will triumphantly accept his party's nomination, also in Massachusetts. Seemingly, it would be hard to contrive a better symbol of the Republican claim that Massachusetts, and its favorite son, are outside the national mainstream.

Kerry, traversing a political minefield, says he is for civil unions but not gay marriage. The Massachusetts political establishment, meanwhile, is in an uproar, with the Democratic House speaker and the Republican governor promoting a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Because the amendment process in Massachusetts takes a minimum of two years, thousands of gay and lesbian couples could be married in 2004 and ordered unmarried in 2006.

More immediately, the Democratic National Convention could display a sideshow, with gay and lesbian married couples celebrating and demonstrating outside the hall, providing footage for Republican operatives. It's fair to say that Massachusetts' high court, by mandating gay marriage, leapfrogged public opinion, which was barely ready to accept civil union. This won't be the first time that Democrats get caught in the propwash of a divisive reform that eventually becomes broadly accepted. But despite Karl Rove's best efforts, how much of a political disaster for Democrats need this be?

As the rest of this package of articles sug-

gests, liberals and Democrats have actually been making headway on "values" issues. For starters, Democrats since Bill Clinton have succeeded in reminding voters that pocketbook issues are values issues. The opportunities we give our children, how we as a society treat working families, the way we deal with illness,



Of All Stripes: Will gay marriage overshadow larger issues this fall?

and our treatment of the elderly all reflect values—and all cut the Democrats' way. The recent bare-breast imbroglio at the Super Bowl served as a reminder that cultural coarseness is brought to you courtesy of the right's cherished free market. Even gay and lesbian rights, perhaps the most divisive of cultural issues, have become as much of a wedge issue for conservatives as for liberals. It is the right, increasingly, that is embarrassed by anti-gay bigotry. And despite the pressure from the Republican Party's fundamentalist base, the Bush administration has hesitated to be overtly anti-gay

for fear of offending moderates (and Republican families like the Cheneys).

Kerry's principal opponent, John Edwards, has modeled how to deal with the gay-marriage issue: State your position (Edwards supports domestic-partner benefits), then declare forcefully that the election is not about gay marriage but about George W. Bush's failure to lead on pocketbook and foreign-policy issues.

For Kerry, this balancing act will be harder. The Massachusetts court left no room for a

compromise. The only way to make civil unions the law in Massachusetts would be to amend the state's constitution, giving homosexual couples the right to state-approved civil union with all the legal benefits of marriage, but not marriage itself. Gay-rights groups correctly view this as an affront. If there is no practical difference, the only reason for the invidious distinction is to pander to the lingering bigotry of straights.

Yet, ever since Clinton's compromise on gays in the military, most gay and lesbian activists have demonstrated that they are also political realists. They hated the "don't ask, don't tell" gimmick, which required subterfuge and dishonesty, yet recognized Clinton as a friend

and ally. Likewise, Howard Dean opposed gay marriage and supported civil unions only because a court ruling forced him to pick one or the other. However, gay activists rallied to Dean as their champion because he represented progress.

If Kerry (or Edwards) declares support for civil unions and insists that the campaign is mainly about other issues, the damage should be containable, and the bigotry of the right could even prove an embarrassment to Bush. Let's be thankful that gays and lesbians appear in the most unlikely of families. ■

which is far more poignant now that it has been shorn of its patriarchal enforcements and hypocrisies. “Husband, I come” (said in fact by a Shakespearean queen to a Roman married to someone else). “Que faró senza Euridice?” “Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be.”

BUT NONE OF THIS MEANS THAT I FEEL COMPLACENT about marriage as an equal institution for young heterosexuals under capitalism today. It could be legal perfection and still not work for partners who are made unequal by gender history and gender economics in the everyday, practical part of their relationships. Perhaps that is one of the reasons younger women are marrying so late.

Socially constructed gender is like a snake-in-the-box, ready to jump out when a young couple hits scarcity. There is more insecurity in the 21st-century workforce than there used to be—more need for two salaries, more burnout, more time crunch in the 24-7 workforce, more anxious job searches, more anguished changes of job or career. Men who marry more often get a “helpmeet” who can help meet the monthly nut. But in many relationships, both partners must work full time, or take two jobs, even before they think of children.

Or who doesn’t, and loses intimate contact with her children during their formative years? Young husbands today may be pro-feminist men, but most will not sacrifice themselves to take the Mommy track, or not for very long, for the sake of their wives’ jobs and careers. Most will have to profit—guiltily, “for the sake of the family”—from whatever favors maleness confers by way of their higher wages and swifter and higher climbs up the age-wage curve. It is an irony of our time that raising children today makes having a husband so convenient and necessary as to seem, once again, obligatory. There’s no room for complacency here, because the pure relationship seems in different ways far out of reach, as in the past.

What would further egalitarian marriage once children are born? A dauntingly vast radical and feminist agenda is implicit in these observations. First, affordable, high-quality child-care and after-school programs, run by well-paid and well-trained and caring teachers. Related to this, an end to the guilt-provoking hostility of childless workers toward working parents, because the latter occasionally get excused “early” to go home for dinner. All of us need the next items on the agenda: a “slow time” movement, rescuing us from the madness of the speed-up regime—the dwindling of the

I dislike the chipper term “companion” and the formal “life partner.” I like saying “39 years.” I think people who want a little sentimentality deserve access to it.

Shadows of patriarchal power and male dominance also survive. A friend told me that when she answered the phone one day, her daughter’s boyfriend asked to speak to her husband so that he could ask the alpha male for her daughter’s “hand.” At Reform Jewish services, the groom often still stomps on the glass. Maybe each is an anachronism standing by itself, not a symbol of traditional male bullying and female inferiority to follow. These younger men presumably want equal partners in marriage; the women are professionals used to independence. May the women who look back from midlife in 2030 on such early tableaux feel nothing worse than the same cringing tolerance for romantic sexist conventions that I feel toward my book-box labels.

In any case, to me every new birth, which should be so welcome as long as women have choice, obliquely announces the possible onset of the Equality Wars. The lack of child care in the United States is as bad as ever, adding domestic uneasiness to work worries. Insecurity and overtime in the workforce lead to more stress in the relationship, felt by both the parents who work double shifts and the children who miss them. Young mothers may have to fight even more fiercely inside their frail, heterosexual dyads than mothers in my generation to avoid the “compromises,” or postponements and defeats, that we suffered while our male partners continued on their culturally lightened careers and job paths. Among those couples who have more economic choices, who stays home with the babies or cuts back on her hours, forgoing promotion to take the “Mommy track”?

weekend, endless cell-phone and computer accessibility, billable quarter-hours, the shrinking of vacations, the need for second jobs, the loss of time for meditation, for enjoying our own rhythms, for free reading and play. Finally, more job security. This would require job creation and much stronger responses to the global race to the bottom, from higher minimum wages to supports for seniority to penalties for companies moving overseas. None of this is around the corner, or even over the river and through the trees. But only as such dramatic changes occurred might we be able to determine how much was left of the Equality Wars between each loving woman and each loving man.

Meanwhile, sighing over these troubles, I sometimes think, OK. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and straight women in midlife or old age, younger women who do not want to have children, all those likelier to achieve equality for themselves with their partners—let them marry if they wish. But as for young straight women who want to live with men and who care about equality and who also want children—until the revolution comes, they would do well to be a little wary. ■

MARGARET MORGANROTH GULLETTE, *a cultural critic, is the author, most recently, of Aged by Culture. Declining to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife received a 1998 prize as the best feminist book on American popular culture. She is a resident scholar at Brandeis University’s Women’s Studies Research Center.*

Forward March

Sure, Democrats lose some votes because of the stands they take on cultural issues. Funny thing, though—on policy, they usually end up winning. So why change?

BY MATTHEW YGLESIAS

WHEN THE MASSACHUSETTS SUPREME Judicial Court ruled on November 18 that gay and lesbian couples have a right to marriage under the state constitution, the predominant mood among liberals was not jubilation, as one might have expected, but a sense of foreboding that George W. Bush, the Republican Party, and the spin doctors of the hard right had just been handed a potent wedge issue to use against the Democrats come election day.

Similarly, much of the anxiety provoked by Howard Dean's presidential bid seems to have been directed not so much at the candidate's policies or his style but at his elite class and regional background. The anxiety seems to have been shared by the Dean campaign itself. When the rabidly anti-tax Club for Growth ran an advertisement in Iowa suggesting that Dean take his "latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, *New York Times*-reading, body-piercing, Hollywood-loving, left-wing freak show back to Vermont, where it belongs," the Dean Web site responded not with a robust defense of sushi (healthy and delicious) and Volvos (safe and fuel-efficient) but by noting that Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson does his writing in a Starbucks and by calling attention to Dean supporters who drink cider and drive Volvo *trucks*—who represent, that is, the working classes. Likewise, the campaign has gone out of its way to trumpet Dean's endorsement by the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, a minor institution member-wise but one whose macho cred is second to none in the house of labor.

At one level, this is simple electioneering—any candidate has to be able to relate to "normal" Americans. But the elite-liberal desire for a working-class identification also seems to involve a bit of self-loathing on the part of the well-educated, postmodern professional class that represents an increasingly large share of the Democratic electorate—and that provides the bulk of the personnel not merely for the Dean campaign but for liberal organizations as a whole.

Perhaps we, fond of our self-image as the party of compassion, are discomfited by the possibility that to some extent we *are* in it for ourselves. We are reluctant to admit concern not just over what Republican rule means for the poor and downtrodden, but also what the stigmatization of the coasts and the cities as spawning grounds of decadence and immorality means for *us*.

We shouldn't be so afraid. It's true that the Democrats have been hurt at the polls by their association with cultural liberalism, from the drubbing Al Gore took on gun control in

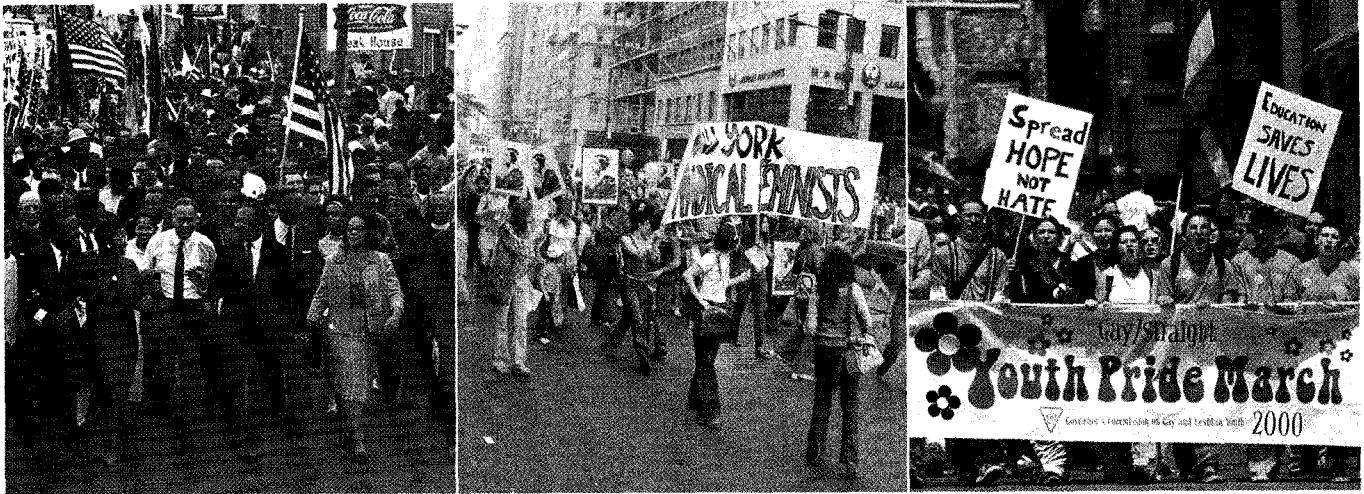
West Virginia to the 2002 governor's race in Georgia (lost in no small part over the question of the Confederate flag). Still, we've not exactly been losing the battle of ideas on this front. The civil-rights advances of the mid-1960s were, in their way, a tactical debacle for Democrats, pushing the formerly solid South firmly into the GOP column. But Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy" provoked no move toward resegregation, and such an initiative today is literally unthinkable.

Similarly, no one is trying to put women back in the kitchen, and public opinion remains firmly in favor of a basic right to reproductive freedom. (Despite conservative legislative success on some low-profile issues, even George W. Bush has shied away from the rhetorical support Ronald Reagan offered for a total abortion ban.) School prayer, eliminated by a liberal U.S. Supreme Court in 1962, likewise seems to have vanished from the discourse for the time being, despite the best of conservative efforts. Even on gay rights, liberals keep winning: The Massachusetts marriage ruling came in the wake of the Supreme Court's reversal of anti-sodomy laws, Vermont's institution of a civil-unions scheme, and the *Romer v. Evans* decision striking down an anti-gay amendment to the Colorado Constitution.

Moreover, much as the right would like to paint all these advances as just so much judicial activism, the fact remains that steady majorities of the public basically reject fundamentalist moralism. A Gallup Poll in December showed 79 percent of Americans believing that gays should be allowed to serve openly in the military, a far cry from the 1994 midterms, when Democrats were decimated in part by Bill Clinton's more modest "don't ask, don't tell" policy. ABC News polls from June 2001 had 60 percent of the public supporting federal funding for stem-cell research, leading the president to cloak his religiously motivated opposition in a veil of obfuscation. A 1999 survey by Hickman-Brown Research found just 24 percent of the public in favor of the abstinence-only approach to sex education highlighted by the president in his most recent State of the Union address.

Indeed, though liberals often feel under assault by a religious resurgence in America, and though Christian conservatives are vocal and well organized, the fact is that the country as a whole is growing *less*, not more, devout. In 1972, 35 percent of voters attended religious services weekly or more. By 2000, that was down to 25 percent. Meanwhile, the proportion of voters who go to church a Dean-like once a year or less has more than doubled to 42 percent, up from a tiny 18 percent 30 years ago.

It's an odd pairing—electoral defeat coupled with victory



March of Time: On civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights, history shows that public opinion eventually catches up with the liberal position.

after victory both on policy and in the court of public opinion. But it isn't hard to understand. Public opinion has consistently moved to the left on tolerance issues, with the Democrats keeping a step or two ahead of it and the GOP staying a calculated step or two behind. If conservatives had taken seriously William Buckley's memorable advice from the 1950's "to stand athwart history, yelling 'Stop!'" the Republican Party would have been wiped out long ago. As often as it is repeated that Barry Goldwater lost the 1964 election but won the long-term ideological struggle, it remains the case that a candidate who tried to seek high office today by opposing the Civil Rights Act and 35 years of feminism would suffer a defeat that would make the Goldwater landslide look like a minor setback. The Republicans recently found themselves forced—largely under pressure from fellow conservatives—to disavow Trent Lott's segregationism, and there's little doubt that today's proponents of a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage will look just as prehistoric a generation from now.

Progressive values in the culture wars benefit from a positive-feedback mechanism: Measures to include blacks, women, and now uncloseted gays and lesbians in the public sphere lead more people to interact with the formerly excluded group, building popular support for further measures. The right survives this dynamic merely by shifting to the left.

Republican support for school prayer in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling banning the practice has been repeatedly downgraded, from Ronald Reagan's advocacy of mandatory prayer to Newt Gingrich's promise of an amendment allowing voluntary prayer to the No Child Left Behind Act's mere guarantee that no one will be denied a right to "constitutionally protected prayer," a meaningless sop to the base.

As recently as 1986, the high court upheld discriminatory sodomy bans, but a decidedly more conservative court reversed itself 6 to 3 last June in a case in which even Clarence Thomas felt the need to call the law "uncommonly silly" (though not, in his mind, unconstitutional). Various elements of the right waxed indignant about judicial activism, but instead of trying to turn back the tide, the president simply shifted the conversation toward marriage.

After years during which Republicans pushed xenophobic immigrant-bashing arguments, the Bush administration has recognized the party's long-term need to boost its appeal to Hispanic voters and put forward an immigration-reform plan that, while inadequate, goes beyond anything the Clinton administration was able to accomplish. Similarly, while Pete Wilson's anti-immigrant politics went down well in early-'90s California, the proposals were gutted in later years. And while Arnold Schwarzenegger certainly pushed this button a few times in his 2003 defeat of Gray Davis, his substantive proposal—repealing a law promising driver's licenses to illegals—was trivial compared with the vast array of denials of state services that Wilson had put on the table.

Can and should liberals take steps to reduce the electoral cost of staying ahead of the curve on these topics? Of course. If support for equal rights and tolerance were to be expressed in the form of an unvariegated hostility to religion, the South, or rural America ("take your pickup-driving, gun-toting, grits-eating, Bible-thumping freak show back to Alabama, where it belongs!"), that would be both tactically foolish and deeply unfaithful to the values of equality, privacy, and toleration that motivates cultural liberalism in the first place. Moreover, these values are just that—values—not cheap moral relativism, a point that Democratic politicians of all ideological hues need to make more forcefully. At the end of the day, however, the fact is that the strategy of leading public opinion works—not at winning elections but at implementing policies. This, ultimately, is what politics is all about.

Sometime in the Reagan years Democrats essentially stopped making the case for increased public investment and the taxes that go with it, and shifted the conversation to how much tax cutting a deficit-racked nation could afford. Twenty years later, the tax code has only grown more regressive and the deficit is huge. The Democrats' desire to do what it took to follow public opinion on taxes was understandable in the short term. But as they've learned with the Bush tax cuts, a tactical retreat can quickly become a rout. Republicans today face the same problem on cultural matters. Whatever happens in 2004, as long as liberals stay in the fight, time is on our side. ■

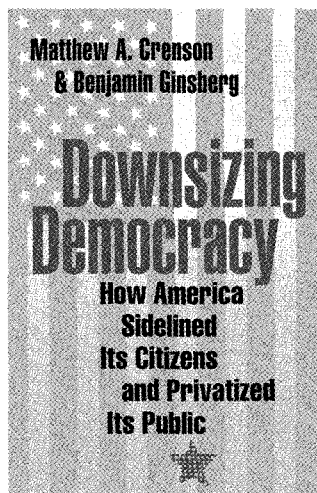
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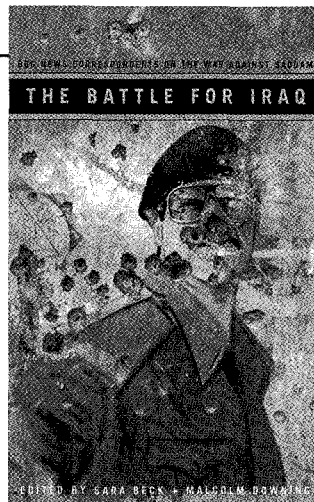
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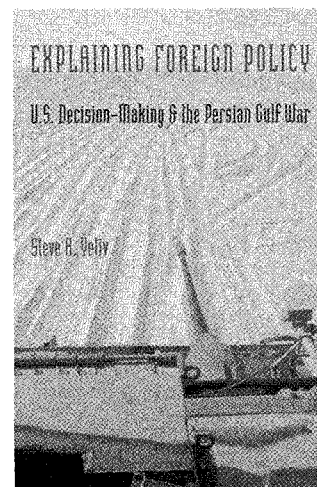
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Currents

IDEAS



Fast Rise: Ramadan, Europe's leading Muslim intellectual, has some surprising ideas about the West's future.

The Gentle Jihadist

Tariq Ramadan touched off a firestorm with a charged accusation against French Jewish intellectuals. But the problems hardly stop there.

BY LEE SMITH

IF FRENCH PRESIDENT JACQUES CHIRAC thought he'd burnished his reputation in the Muslim world for having opposed the Bush administration's war in Iraq, he must have been surprised to find himself recently vilified in public squares, mosques, and universities from Cairo to Tehran. The proposed ban on the *hijab*, or Islamic headscarf, from French state schools has enraged a fair portion of the world's 1 billion Muslims. And yet the ban, which prohibits overtly religious symbols like yarmulkes and "large" crosses, is not so much directed at French Muslims as intended to check

France's growing fundamentalist, or Islamist, movement.

Chirac is right to be concerned: In Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere throughout the Muslim world, Islamists read the number of veiled women as a vital statistic through which they can calculate their power and advertise it. A large surge in those women's numbers indicates a big problem for the ruling government. Unfortunately for France, banning the *hijab* will only give credence to the Islamist assertion that their faith is under attack.

France could have stopped the

Islamists before they grew so strong, but that would have meant a serious effort to integrate young North Africans, or *beurs*, into French society. The *beurs* were born Muslim, but they were not born Islamist. French-Algerian pop culture throughout the 1980s and '90s may document their alienation from mainstream French culture, but it also records their desire for it. Young North African men wanted jobs, money, clothes, maybe some worldly success, and, like the rest of the known world's male population, French women. In those songs and movies, the Islamists were typically cast as sexually frustrated hypocrites and/or incompetent criminals. The Islamists assassinated some of the *beurs*' heroes, like Cheb Hasni, a Rai singer gunned down in Algeria in 1994 for his songs about girls and beer. That Chirac is managing to drive these kids into the Islamists' fold is frankly astounding.

Now France's Islamists, both empowered and feeling themselves besieged, have initiated their violent campaign of terror. Their attacks on Jews have now evidently been joined by attacks on other Muslims as well. Recently, a government-appointed Muslim prefect luckily escaped injury after his car was rigged with a bomb. Collaborators with the "regime," especially officials of state-sponsored religious authorities, are always high on Islamist hit lists, as are intellectuals and journalists.

This, then, is the context in which the Tariq Ramadan affair took place. Ramadan, a Swiss national, is a well-respected professor of philosophy at a Swiss university and a German one, and Europe's most prominent Islamist intellectual. In an article posted on a Muslim Web site, www.oumma.com, last fall, he accused several French writers of forsaking their reputations as "universalist" thinkers by taking posi-

tions based on narrow, sectarian, or what the French call “communitarian,” concerns. How else to explain that Alain Finkielkraut, Bernard-Henri Levy, and Bernard Kouchner, among several other popular intellectual figures, failed to condemn the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the war on Iraq, which Sharon also favored?

RAMADAN’S ARGUMENT RESTS ON A feeble premise: that the failures to condemn Sharon or to protest the war in Iraq are not plausibly rational positions. The reason for holding such views must therefore be extra-rational, or emotional. To Ramadan, these thinkers took these positions because they are Jewish.

The piece touched off a firestorm. Levy rashly compared the article to *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, editorial writers condemned Ramadan, and sev-

Ramadan’s grandfather was Hassan al-Banna, one of the major figures of the Islamist movement. In 1928, he founded the Arab world’s oldest and still largest Islamist organization, the Muslim Brotherhood. Given that the brotherhood’s history is replete with violence, including a cycle of killings and government reprisals that ultimately claimed al-Banna’s life, many of Ramadan’s critics cite this as a reason for concern. That’s not quite fair: Ramadan never advocates violence. Furthermore, al-Banna was hardly a gangster. He was an able writer, teacher, and one of 20th-century Egypt’s most talented political activists. What Ramadan does share with his grandfather is an essential insight into the state of contemporary Muslim life: Muslims, they both believe, need to get back to true Islam. The difference between them is the context.

“The Jewish or Christian origins have faded or simply disappeared,” Ramadan writes. The answer to this spiritual malaise, as the Muslim Brothers say, is Islam.

eral politicians who worked with the philosopher in the anti-globalization movement publicly distanced themselves from him. The controversy hit on a number of sensitive issues, namely Islamist tactics and, of course, anti-Semitism.

But all the attention seems only to have enhanced Ramadan’s reputation as a “moderate.” This January, the University of Notre Dame named him the Henry Luce Professor at its Joan B. Kroc Center for International Peace Studies. As the center’s director, Scott Appleby, told *The New York Sun*, “If we are going to avoid a violent conflict with radical Muslims, we will do so by taking the risk of understanding their point of view, their criticisms of the West, and also having the authority to talk with them.” Evidently, American academics have come to the same conclusion their French intellectual counterparts reached: Better someone like Ramadan than a jihadist. But as his new book, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, makes clear, he is in fact a jihadist—not a violent one like Osama bin Laden, but a jihadist nonetheless.

Al-Banna, living in Egypt during the English occupation, thought that beginning with the Ottomans, centuries of foreign rule had separated Muslims from their genuine faith. Ramadan, born in the West, believes the problem is that cultural accretions having nothing to do with the Muslim faith—even though they may be found in Muslim cultures, be they Arab, African, or Asian—have injured true Islam. All of the evils associated with Islam—sexism, anti-Semitism, tribalism, and the like—are cultural, not Islamic. Once these influences are purged, you have the real Islam, an Islam that Western secularists, leftists, and multiculturalists all like because it repudiates scary, violent Islam. Except it also affirms a very anti-multicultural position. If, say, famed ethnographer Clifford Geertz thinks that there are as many Islams as there are Muslims, Ramadan sharply asserts, “There is one Islam.”

The essence of Ramadan’s most provocative idea is that it is in the Western liberal democracies that this one Islam can manifest itself, far from

the cultural habits and authoritarian politics of the Muslim world. It’s a novel twist on the perpetual ambition of Islamism to return to the faith’s original state.

But that’s hardly all. It’s not just that the West is the future of Islam; Islam is the future of the West. Ramadan believes that the problem with the West is its spiritual malaise. “The Jewish or Christian origins have faded or simply disappeared,” he writes. Unlike traditional Christian and Jewish thinkers who merely lament the loss of religious life in a culture of abundance, Ramadan has an answer. The solution, as the Muslim Brothers like to say, is Islam.

To understand fully the scope of Ramadan’s conception, it’s important to understand that for the Islamists, Islam is not just one of the three monotheistic faiths, nor is it merely the completion of the Abrahamic tradition. As Ramadan writes, it “corrects the messages that came before it.” Islam doesn’t complement the Torah and New Testament; it supersedes them. Today in the West, the Jews and the Christians have again lost their way, much as they did 1,400 years ago. That’s why he calls the West *dar al-dawa*, or the place for “inviting people to God.” Ramadan quotes a source as saying that in the eyes of the first Muslims, “The Arabian peninsula was *dar al-dawa*.” The West is awaiting the call to Islam, just as the 7th-century Arabs were.

And as life was hard for the first Muslims of Mecca, so has it been for the Muslim immigrants to the West. Ramadan writes, “It is certainly quite normal that, during the first decades of their new presence in the West, Muslims should have sought principally to protect themselves; they had no choice.”

This is wrong. Political refugees may come to the West to protect themselves, but the vast majority of immigrants don’t. To be sure, the first wave of any immigrant group keeps close, but the idea has always been to break out of the ghetto and succeed on your own merits. As for America specifically, life has been harder for Muslims than it was before September 11, but new mosques have been built, prayers said, and veils worn to public schools. Perhaps most tellingly, and contrary to almost everyone’s most

fearful assumptions, there has been no unbroken string of suicide attacks that was going to make Manhattan look like Tel Aviv. This isn't about homeland security; it's a story about immigration and how the Muslims who come to America come to partake of its telling.

This is what the *beurs* wanted, and the French betrayed them. Moreover, it's what Europe's Jews did before Europe extinguished them. It's convenient for Ramadan to suppose Muslims are Europe's first wave of non-Christian immigrants, as though no one's been through this before. Recognizing and publicly remembering the history of European Jews, who once numbered in the tens of millions, would afford Ramadan's thought a large and much needed dose of the universalism he finds absent in the work of Jewish intellectuals.

That Ramadan believes Islam will replace Judaism and Christianity may come as a surprise to those who thought he was just saying Islam is compatible with liberal values (it will certainly surprise the fathers at Notre Dame). Rather, Ramadan is a cold-blooded Islamist who believes that Islam is the cure for the malaise wrought by liberal

values. His revision of the jihadist paradigm—peaceful but total—is brilliant in its way, and he may well turn out to be a major Islamist intellectual, far surpassing even his grandfather's influence. His cry of death to the West is a quieter and gentler jihad, but it's still jihad. There's no reason for Western liberals to try to understand that point of view.

Whether or not Islam is after all compatible with liberal values is a vexing question. Still, it's an abstract issue that is overshadowed by the fact that a lot of Arab and Muslim individuals do subscribe to liberal values, regardless of how the compatibility question is finally to be answered. Many are pressing for them in their home countries, while others have fled to the West to find them here. To the extent that Western liberals see Ramadan as an "authentic" spokesman of Arab and Muslim culture, while dismissing Arab and Muslim liberals as too Westernized, they've forgotten their own universal values. ■

LEE SMITH *lives in Brooklyn and Cairo. His book on Arabic culture will be published by Scribner.*

MEDIA

Reclaiming the Air

Rush Limbaugh created the model for conservative talk radio. Now a new network hopes to use comedy—liberally—to build an alternative.

BY PAUL STARR

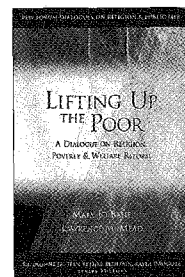
THIS SPRING, IF ALL GOES ACCORDING to plan, a new radio network with programs modeled after *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* will make its debut. The viewpoint of the venture is the big news. Air America Radio, as it's now being called, promises to be the first commercial network with a liberal political outlook in a medium that for years has been dominated by conservatives.

Of all the media, radio has undergone the most decisive shift to the right during the past two decades. Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and other conservative

talk-show hosts do not merely outdraw and outnumber liberals; they have hardly any progressive competition at the national level. Although public-radio stations broadcast liberal voices, they do not offer a counterweight to the hard-right slant of talk radio and the express support that its biggest stars provide the Republican Party. Limbaugh played a critical role in the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 and in George W. Bush's defeat of John McCain and Al Gore in 2000. The Democrats have no one on the air who can rally their troops.

Two aspects of radio make it difficult

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Is the Market Moral?

A Dialogue on Religion,
Economics, and Justice

Rebecca M. Blank and William McGurn

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today to redress the political balance. People generally listen to stations for their format—Top 40, country, rock, news, talk—rather than a specific program. Radio stations are “mood buttons,” as Martin Kaplan, associate dean at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communications, calls them. Once Limbaugh and others established the conservative talk format, other shows along similar lines fit readily into that model and mood. But liberal talk shows on the same buttons haven’t succeeded—the audience wasn’t theirs. A serious liberal enterprise in radio now faces the challenge of creating an entire lineup for a new format—a far more expensive proposition than producing a few hours of programming.

But getting this new lineup on the air is also harder today than it was even a decade ago because of the changed structure of the industry. Since Congress eliminated limits on station ownership in 1996, large chains with centralized decision making have taken over a growing share of commercial stations, including many of the strongest and most desir-

able ones in top markets. “You can’t rely on a syndication strategy because of central decisions about programming,” argues Kaplan, who has been involved in Air America’s development. National distribution, in this view, requires full control of a network’s major-market stations by leasing them or buying them outright. That means a liberal network has to jump over an even higher investment hurdle.

Conservative domination of talk radio seems so well entrenched that many take it as an unalterable part of the political landscape. To conservatives themselves, it’s proof of popular support, as if the country weren’t split nearly down the middle in elections and opinion surveys. And even some liberals wonder whether there isn’t something about radio as a medium that lends itself to the right.

History doesn’t support that interpretation. In the United States, radio has twice served as a critical medium of progressive change. During the 1930s and ’40s, when conservative publishers dominated the press, Franklin Roosevelt and New Deal agencies reached the public

directly through the airwaves. Although right-wing figures also got on the air, radio was a political equalizer for liberals. Surveys from the period show that Democrats were more oriented to radio, Republicans to newspapers. Radio, the sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld wrote in 1941, “is probably at this moment the most neutral and fairest institution in the country” because of the balance between “the businessmen who own it” and the New Dealers who regulate it.

During the 1950s and ’60s, radio played a key role in progressive change for a second time, even as the medium underwent a transformation after the advent of television. Previously, radio stations had offered a variety of entertainment programs, broadcasting the most popular network shows in the prime-time evening hours. When TV took over that role in family entertainment, radio stations switched to particular formats, beginning with Top 40. FM, though invented three decades earlier, finally took off in the 1960s, increasing the number of channels, and public radio began to develop. Growing concentration of owner-

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ship and control has been the dominant trend in much of the media in the 20th century, but the postwar decades in radio were the opposite. Federal Communications Commission regulations limited the number of stations any corporation could own, the networks declined, and radio actually became more local and decentralized than during its golden age. It was in this new context that rock 'n' roll, alternative radio, and black stations took off. Though seemingly eclipsed by television, radio was arguably more important than TV in the cultural and political upheaval of the '60s.

Two decades later, political change contributed to the rise of right-wing talk shows. In 1987, Ronald Reagan's appointees to the FCC abandoned the fairness doctrine, which had required broadcast stations to maintain editorial balance and to offer reply time to those who were personally attacked on the air. As a result of deregulation, talk stations could cater to a particular ideological audience, just as music stations adopted a single style. By the 1980s, satellite technology was also making it cheaper to transmit talk shows and other programs nationwide and creating the basis for new radio networks to expand.

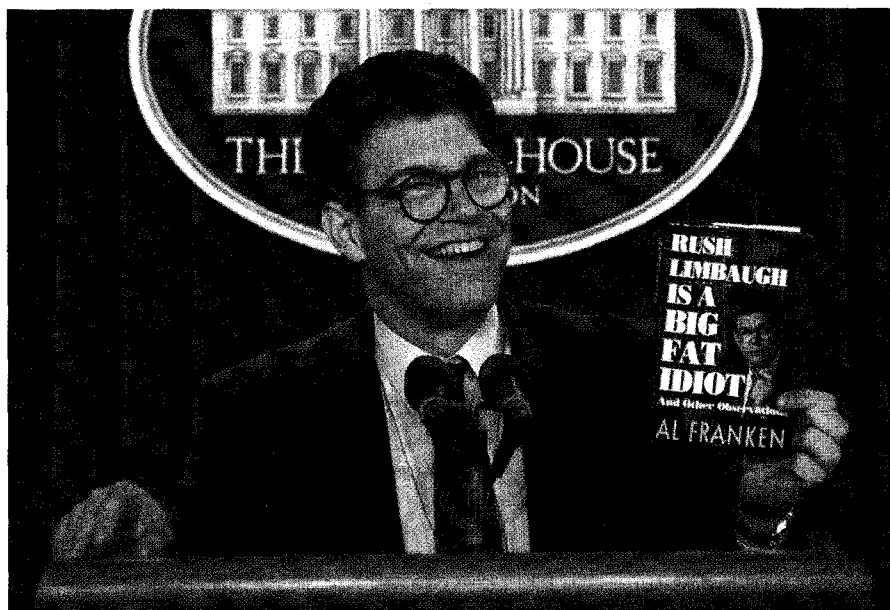
In the same period, as a white male backlash developed against feminism and affirmative action, a gender gap emerged in voter preferences—and a corresponding gap emerged between daytime television and radio. The contrast between Oprah Winfrey and Rush Limbaugh epitomizes the difference. While the daytime TV audience is primarily female, the radio audience, especially during the crucial drive-time hours, is disproportionately male. Drivers also typically listen to the radio alone, uninhibited by the presence of other members of their families. Thus, both the demographic profile of drive-time listeners and the mode of reception lent itself to a macho brand of talk that repudiated liberalism and the social changes it had championed since the '60s.

Although talk-show hosts such as Howard Stern and Don Imus also exemplified a macho, anti-feminist style, Limbaugh played the primary role in creating a model for right-wing radio entertainment. After going national in 1988—he had previously been a DJ in

Sacramento—Limbaugh helped to assemble the national audience for the conservative talk format and served as the link between the Republican Party and much of its base constituency. In 1990, according to the trade publication *Inside Radio*, there were 360 news-talk stations; by 1994, the number had risen to 1,197—and, according to *Inside Radio* Editor Tom Taylor, Limbaugh was the catalyst. Of course, Limbaugh didn't come up with three hours of material a day on his own. During the previous two decades, conservative donors had built up think tanks, publishing houses, and

station to get a liberal show. Plus, Hightower and Cuomo weren't funny enough—well, Cuomo wasn't funny at all. Which is why Air America is creating an entire format rather than isolated programs and, for two of its main shows, has signed up comedians rather than politicians as hosts: Al Franken, perhaps the single most talented liberal satirist at work today, and Lizz Winstead, a producer of *The Daily Show*.

Mark Walsh, CEO of Air America's parent company Progress Media, told me in early February that the network would begin broadcasting in four or five of the



Franken's Sense: Can Al do to radio what he did to the best-seller list?

a new generation of conservative intellectuals. Limbaugh retailed their work, amplifying its impact.

Air America Radio has the potential to serve the same function for liberals. But the model is entertainment, particularly satire, rather than the kind of sober talk listeners can already get on National Public Radio. Two earlier efforts to put liberal Limbaughs on the air—Texas populist Jim Hightower and former New York Governor Mario Cuomo—have served as cautionary experiences. Before they were canceled, their shows ran on talk stations dominated by conservative hosts, violating what Air America's president, Jon Sinton, calls the rule of "formatic purity" in radio. Just as you wouldn't tune in to a country station to hear jazz, so you wouldn't turn to a conservative talk

biggest metropolitan areas this April and add two or three more major markets by summer. The company wants to start with a "self-contained" network that is independent of any other organization's decisions and will therefore either purchase the initial stations or lease them full time. But later expansion, Walsh said, will likely involve syndication or affiliation deals to put Air America programs on stations not under its control. Some of those might be underperforming stations that belong to the major chains.

According to Taylor of *Inside Radio*, Air America will necessarily have to "take what they can get," which will be lesser facilities; "the big groups already have the space they have" and are not going to part with their successful stations. Any new network would face this obstacle, says another industry ob-

server, Mark Fratrik of BIA, a company that does economic analysis of stations. Fratrik insists that stations are available and that the fate of Air America will depend on the ratings it draws.

As Sinton and Walsh see it, their network is responding to a business opportunity. According to a calculation by the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, each week the 44 highest-rated talk stations carry 312 hours of conservative shows compared with just five hours from the other side. That ratio suggests there is a “format hole” that a liberal network could fill. What’s especially striking is that the imbalance exists even in some of the most liberal parts of the country. San Francisco now has two

conservative talk stations (KSFO and KNEW), as does Seattle (KVI and KTTH). In an ideal free market, there ought to be plenty of opportunity to offer more liberal programming. But it’s not so simple. The barriers to entry—to starting up a new format—are formidable. Let’s hope that even with the formidable challenges the structure of radio now presents, it’s not too late for a liberal network to succeed. Whatever happens, Air America will send an important signal. We’ll be listening. ■

PAUL STARR is co-editor of the Prospect. Some of the historical background in this article comes from his new book, *The Creation of the Media*.

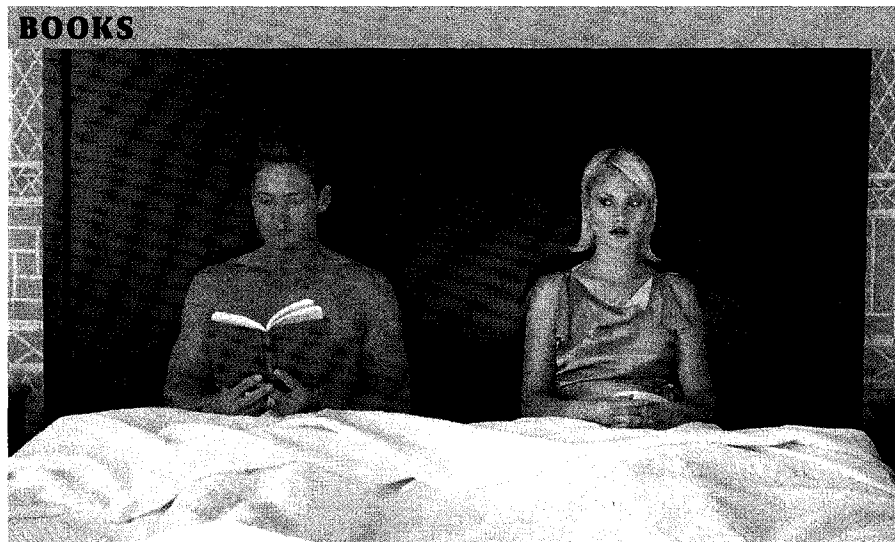
unless their subject was war (cf. James Jones, Norman Mailer, Tim O’Brien). But they didn’t have to worry back then. People were too polite to ask Philip Roth if his mother was the model for Sophie Portnoy, even though they were absolutely certain she was. And didn’t we all know that Roth himself was the model for Portnoy, the crazed teenage masturbator—the liver, the cored apple, the whole hideous, mortifying mess?

Roth had, and still has, the screen of “fiction” to hide behind, even after his ex, Claire Bloom, wrote a tell-all memoir about their life together. Calling it fiction doesn’t mean you made it up; it simply means you don’t have to talk about it.

If this were a movie, the screen might go dark and then the year “2004” might beam onto the next image. Or we could denote the current moment by showing a woman in a dark room at her illuminated laptop computer screen. Perhaps a snippet of a reality TV show, with two strangers on a televised date. Or better yet, a TV commercial I saw recently, featuring a college lecture hall with a crusty old professor explaining to the students that not all of them would become published writers; a student disagrees and describes a computer product that blows all that elitist stuff about publishing right out of the water. Blogging, of course, already allows people, regardless of talent, to bare their soul to the world, and it may not be long before college students can major in the genre.

But until that cultural watershed takes place, we still have the intensely personal memoir to kick around. The trend began its modern life in the 1960s with the “new journalism,” and specifically with a line of Joan Didion’s from her first *Life* magazine column in 1969. She wrote that she and her husband had gone to Hawaii “in lieu of getting divorced.” In the 1990s, memoirs were so popular that fiction writers, myself included, were stunned and stumped by the “true stories” that were jamming the culture waves and making it difficult to sell novels. All publishers wanted, it seemed, were stories of hard luck, unhappy childhoods, incest, and drug addiction.

The latest spate of memoirs are dispatches not from our troubled pasts but from deep in the heart of the Way We Live Now, with our divorces, our same-



Getting Naked in Print

AMERICAN SUCKER BY DAVID DENBY • LITTLE BROWN & COMPANY • 320 PAGES • \$24.95

“DOG TROUBLE” BY CATHLEEN SCHINE • THE NEW YORKER • JANUARY 5, 2004

“WEBSTALKER” BY KATHA POLLITT • THE NEW YORKER • JANUARY 19, 2004

“ENVY” BY KATHRYN CHETKOVICH • GRANTA #82

BY ELIZABETH BENEDICT

IT USED TO BE SO HARD TO BE A WRITER! So many choices—fiction, poetry, history, biography—and so many hurdles. How to pay the bills while you made a name for yourself? Marry well, teach, write other stuff for money? If you did what I did and chose fiction writing, there were all those bothersome rules: disguise char-

acters based on real people, make the father the alcoholic instead of the mother, set the story in Miami Beach instead of Wyoming, and be sure to lie when asked where you get your material.

Real men didn’t write autobiographically. It made them look like frauds and whiners instead of artists—

sex lovers, and our personal computers. The once chaste *New Yorker* has been publishing such confessions in its "Personal History" column for the last few years. Daphne Merkin's piece about her appetite for being spanked set the stage in 1996. In January this year, both Katha Pollitt, poet and feminist commentator, and novelist Cathleen Schine got very personal, Pollitt with admissions of "Webstalking" her ex-lover, Schine with a story about a crazy dog that drove her and her new partner mad. She mentioned that she had recently split up with her husband, having "made one of those unforeseen middle-aged discoveries" that she prefers women to men.

Schine's coming out coincided with the publication of her ex-husband's memoir, *American Sucker*. Though David Denby is a *New Yorker* film critic and author of *Great Books*, here he tackles the collapse of his marriage and subsequent obsession with money and playing the NASDAQ, spurred by his desire to buy out Schine's share of their apartment.

Pollitt, Schine, and Denby are established writers who are too classy, we might think, to stoop to this genre. But there they are, getting naked in print for money. Some readers wonder what drove these high-minded folks to agree to public stripteases, to selling the true stories of their frailties and obsessions. Some are certain that the writers must feel ashamed and humiliated, as though an essay in *The New Yorker* were a confession on an afternoon TV show, a banner blaring across the screen: "TRIED INTERNET PORN. LOST BIG \$\$\$ ON TECH STOCKS."

Although not as many people read Kathryn Chetkovich's essay "Envy" in a recent issue of *Granta*, its pained revelations raised a few literary eyebrows and got more media attention than her ignored collection of short stories. For 16 pages, she relates the paroxysms of envy she feels for her boyfriend, the novelist Jonathan Franzen, though she doesn't actually name him. Long before he is famous, she envies his discipline as a writer; once he is famous, she envies his phenomenal success.

In the 1960s, Andy Warhol said that in the future everyone would be famous for 15 minutes. But he couldn't have predicted the scope or intensity of our cul-

ture of confession, consumerism, and celebrity. Nor could Warhol have predicted that eventually, well-regarded critics and commentators would end up throwing in their lot with the confessional memoirists of the day, making this phenomenon span the classes, afflicting all: high-, low-, and middle-brow.

Yet the upwardly intellectual drift of the genre doesn't surprise or bother me. I'm delighted to read such smart, witty, observant writers reporting on what it means to be alive and fully human today. And what a relief, finally, that people can say what it *really* means, instead of having to put out an uptight, sanitized version—the puritanical press release instead of the truth. None of this means that I dwell on whether I "like" the essays or "like" Pollitt from what I've read about her, but if she has the chutzpah and the skill to describe her Webstalking—which has that name, we learn, because plenty

that reach pays off handsomely.

The other reason I am inclined to defend these writers against charges of literary exhibitionism has to do with a story that's not being told—the story of how impossibly difficult it is to make a living as a writer, and I don't mean a writer with a university salary or a spouse with a decent income. Denby, Schine, and Pollitt may appear to be prosperous enough not to be influenced by literary trends—Denby, with his *New Yorker* job, more so than the other two—but writers have to follow the zeitgeist if we want to stay in the game of selling our work. We don't get paid for showing up. We still only get royalty statements twice a year; health insurance for the self-employed is a luxury item; and many writers end up with almost no Social Security because our incomes fluctuate and are mostly on the low end. The literary life was difficult when Dr.

We might think these writers are too classy to stoop to the confessional genre. But there they are, selling the true stories of their frailties and obsessions.

of other people are doing it, too—she's got my attention and my curiosity.

Is Pollitt writing in revenge at being left by her lover? I'll leave that to her. The piece doesn't read like a rant, in any case. And what of her ex's privacy? I imagine *The New Yorker's* lawyers had their say; perhaps she changed a few details. Otherwise, I turn to a crucial lesson from Joan Didion: "A writer is always selling somebody out."

American Sucker is smartly written, hugely engaging, full of self-mockery, good humor, and erudition. It's about far more than the end of Denby's marriage, which he treats with great discretion. It's a powerful cautionary tale about being swept up into market mania. Like the essays by Schine and Pollitt, it gets very personal very fast. But unlike them, it reaches far beyond the personal, and that may be something to strive for when writing a book-length memoir. Yes, the memoir is "all about you." But what distinguishes Denby from a one-book memoirist is that he can reach beyond himself and his own tsuris. In *American Sucker*,

Johnson told us about the hack writers on London's Grub Street, and it will always be. It's graceless to complain; it's a privileged life in so many ways, except, of course, for the money.

Kathryn Chetkovich got a lot of attention for spilling her guts about her envy of Jonathan Franzen, but the truth is that every fiction writer in America envies him—not for his talent, as he might like, but because he doesn't have to worry about money anymore. When you hit the jackpot, you can win very big these days, but when you don't—or, say, you have kids in college or health insurance that's \$5,000 a year—you look around and see what's selling these days, in our culture of confession, consumerism, and celebrity, and you do what the pros always do: Get yourself an assignment and write the hell out of it. ■

ELIZABETH BENEDICT's most recent novel is *Almost*. She serves on the board of the Authors League Fund, which gives emergency loans to career writers.

BOOKS



Liar, Liar

LIES AND THE LYING LIARS WHO TELL THEM: A FAIR AND BALANCED LOOK AT THE RIGHT BY AL FRANKEN • E.P. DUTTON • 379 PAGES • \$24.95

THE LIES OF GEORGE W. BUSH: MASTERING THE POLITICS OF DECEPTION BY DAVID CORN • CROWN • 337 PAGES • \$24.00

THE BOOK ON BUSH: HOW GEORGE W. BUSH (MIS)LEADS AMERICA BY ERIC ALTERMAN AND MARK J. GREEN • VIKING PRESS • 448 PAGES • \$24.95

HAD ENOUGH? A HANDBOOK FOR FIGHTING BACK BY JAMES CARVILLE • SIMON & SCHUSTER • 306 PAGES • \$23.00

BIG LIES: THE RIGHT-WING PROPAGANDA MACHINE AND HOW IT DISTORTS THE TRUTH BY JOE CONASON • THOMAS DUNNE BOOKS • 245 PAGES • \$24.95

BY MATTHEW YGLESIAS

FLIP YOUR TV OVER TO FOX, OPEN THE pages of *The Washington Times* or a conservative magazine, or direct your browser to the burgeoning network of conservative Web sites and you'll see that the right-wing hate machine is alive and well. Not only was this network of commentary instrumental in pushing the "Gore is a liar" line into mainstream analysis of the 2000 election, it was absolutely vital to GOP victories in the 2002 midterms; legitimating the smear campaign against Max Cleland; endlessly pushing the tale of Paul Wellstone's memorial service; demonizing the Democrats' de facto leader, Tom Daschle; and effectively eliding the distinction between criticism of the Bush administration and ir-

resolution in the face of terrorism.

After years of taking this abuse lying down, liberals have decided to land a few blows of their own and produced a small stack of feisty books to counter the screeds issuing forth from the likes of Regnery Publishing. The mainstream media have responded to this largely with a wave of hand-wringing over the decline of civility in American political discourse. And, indeed, there's nothing civil about Al Franken's *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them*, which calls Anne Coulter a "nutcase," describes Bill O'Reilly as a "lying, splotchy bully," and proudly recounts Franken's "bitch-slapping" of Bernard Goldberg. Nor is Joe Conason's discussion in *Big Lies* of conservatism's prominent philanderers

a polite way to proceed. Writing a book detailing *The Lies of George W. Bush*, as David Corn has done, is rude from the get-go, but it's not clear what else liberals are supposed to do in the face of demonstrable falsehoods.

The unifying tone of the books, however, is less incivility than simply relentless critique of the president and the party that now controls all branches of the U.S. government. *The Book on Bush* by Eric Alterman and Mark Green is about as civil as a political book can get, offering a dense, encyclopedic catalogue of administration misdeeds, complete with copious footnotes to supporting documentation. It's less fun to read, but it clearly demonstrates a dislike of the president based on his actions, not some irrational hatred.

Corn, with an equally comprehensive approach, gives us a book that is only uncivil insofar as it is blunt in calling attention to facts that the mainstream press seems to find it untoward to note. The trouble is that after calling George W. Bush a liar in the opening line of the book, Corn has to make the same point in different words. Within just eight pages on tax policy we get "distortions and misrepresentations," "unsubtle distortions," "a transparent effort to engage in the most creative of accounting," and four other variations on the same theme. History may remark that the Bush administration's greatest contribution was to provide an impetus for the proliferation of ways to call someone a liar.

Franken's *Lies*, despite the similar title, takes a different approach, offering a scattershot review of administration falsehoods, attacks on FOX News personalities, a personal anecdote or two, and a parody. "Journalists are pro free trade," he writes, "precisely because they know their jobs are not at risk for exportation." As Franken writes, "[A] fourteen-year-old Bangladeshi might be able to sew my sneakers (and he did a great job), but there's no way he could write this book." Franken then has an apocryphal "Kharap Juta" try his hand at comedy and, predictably, the results are dismal.

Though Franken isn't at his strongest criticizing fiscal policy, he's in his element satirizing the media. FOX's claim to

be fair and balanced, he writes, would be more plausible “if the rest of the media actually had a liberal bias. Or if FOX wasn’t so obviously slanted to the right. Or if [Roger] Ailes weren’t a cynical Republican ideologue with no regard for fairness or balance. Any of those things would add a lot to that argument.”

James Carville offers us something of a third way, with a book organized along similar lines to Corn’s and Green and Alterman’s but punctuated by the occasional wisecrack. The price of the more freewheeling approach is a certain unevenness in quality. His first Cajun cooking tips are funny, but the shtick gets a bit stale. A “Homeland Security Fairy Tale,” designed to highlight the administration’s fall 2002 bait and switch on terrorism prevention, also doesn’t work. Franken’s book, too, is marred by a fairly long and not especially amusing “Operation Chickenhawk” chapter, where we see John Kerry leading a battalion of famous conservative draft dodgers up the Mekong Delta.

Conason’s discussion of the same topic is perhaps his book’s strongest, leveraging what could have been nothing but a series of below-the-belt hits into a sophisticated discussion of right-wing attacks on liberal patriotism and a defense of liberalism’s honorable record on national security. Relative to the others, Conason’s book is an outlier, focusing less on specific instances of dishonesty than on broad thematic tropes that distort the overall national discourse. Each chapter begins with a widely accepted assertion—“Conservatives believe in color-blind equality, while liberals cynically exploit the victimization of blacks and other minorities,” leads chapter seven—that Conason proceeds to debunk. But his counter-generalizations are tempered with evenhandedness, as when he writes, “Both major parties and politicians of varying ideologies are implicated in cronyism, too, even if some benefit far more than others.”

Such caveats highlight an important difference between the new blunt liberalism and the hard-edged conservatism to which comparisons are all but inevitable. The mainstream press has tended to treat these two genres with a kind of moral equivalence, noting the

strident tone and partisan demeanor of both while ignoring the question of accuracy. But where the liberal authors deal in abstractions and generalities, they provide appropriate disclaimers that a generalization is just that, and authors disinclined to hedge stick to specific, factual assertions.

In a discussion of “tort reform,” for example, Green and Alterman write, “According to the federal National Practitioner Data Bank, from 1991 to 2001 malpractice lawsuit payouts grew an average of 6.2 percent annually. *BusinessWeek* noted that this was ‘almost exactly the rate of medical inflation’ during this period and they dismissed as ‘a myth’ the claim that [R]unaway jury awards are forcing insurers to raise rates.” This is perhaps not the most gripping prose the world has ever known, but as analysis of the

cultural tide that moral conservatives abhor. Conservatives might well get restless but for the success of the right-wing media in stirring up their passion against the opposition.

Democrats could use some of the same passion, though aimed, I would hope, at a more substantive agenda. These books—along with the success of MoveOn.org, the founding of the Center for American Progress, and ongoing efforts to create a progressive radio network—seem to be at least part of what the doctor ordered.

The real problem with this emerging genre is that while each book has its merits, one doesn’t want to read *all* of them, and I trust that few will. Despite stylistic differences—from Carville’s down-home folksiness to Corn’s deadpan to Conason’s indignation—the content remains rather similar. Once you’ve

Mainstream press critics have tended to treat both conservative and liberal anger books as morally equivalent. But they ignore the question of accuracy.

problem it’s more convincing than anecdotes about spilled McDonald’s coffee or the president’s beloved line, “No one was ever healed by a frivolous lawsuit.”

Many pundits would have it that this new angry liberalism portends the Democratic Party’s doom. In this view, the Republicans supposedly wrecked their ship on the shoals of their own anger in 1996 and ’98 only to be revived by a dose of sunny optimism and “compassionate conservatism” in the new millennium. If the Democrats want to win, the thinking goes, best to swallow the rage, admit that Bush is a hell of a nice guy, and debate policy. Indeed, it is true that the GOP went astray when the party gave itself the angry public face of Newt Gingrich, but the partisan conservative press on cable, on the radio, and in print is in many ways more crucial than ever in securing Republican success today. The Bush administration, after all, while obtaining tax cuts and handouts for wealthy donors and well-connected corporations, has done strikingly little to shrink the size of the federal government or to turn back the

heard the story, you don’t necessarily want to hear it again, especially as it thus far lacks a happy ending. The ability of the right’s authors to find an audience for screed after screed has always struck me as somewhat puzzling, and reading more ideologically congenial works has not brought about much enlightenment in this regard. Franken’s, and to some extent Carville’s, gift for satire helps sustain interest—*The Daily Show*, after all, stays enjoyable week after week—but not everyone can do comedy well.

Let us hope, at least for the sake of novelty, that we won’t need new renditions of the genre. A glance at the president’s most recent budget proposal indicates that in the event of reelection, there’ll be no shortage of new examples for another book about government by deception. But will anyone want to read it? At the end of the day, one has to hope that, with their spines restored, liberal writers will have the opportunity to return to the business of remedy. Exposé is just a means of getting there. ■

Vietnam Remembered

BY ROBERT B. REICH

John Kerry perfectly reflects the contradictions in how most Americans want to remember the Vietnam War. It was a heroic effort demanding great courage from hundreds of thousands of young Americans. It was also a tragic mistake that ended

because of the courageous stand against it taken by hundreds of thousands of young Americans. Kerry represents both sides of this awkward equation. He won five decorations for injury and heroism, but then became its antithesis as spokesman for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

George W. Bush perfectly reflects how most Americans don't want to remember the Vietnam War. For one thing, it exposed the dark underbelly of the nation's class structure. Most young college graduates or scions of the wealthy and well-connected did not serve—or if they did, they stayed far out of harm's way. Through family connections, young W. got a coveted position in the National Guard, making it unlikely he'd ever be near a fighting front. Others in his administration or brain trust—Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Robert Kagan, William Kristol—avoided service altogether. (Cheney received at least four separate deferments, later explaining that he “had other priorities in the '60s than military service.”)

In Bush's case, there's also the touchy little matter of what happened after April 1972, when he seemed to have disappeared, with two years of his Guard duty still to go. Apparently he got permission to move to Alabama in order to work on the Senate campaign of one of his father's friends. There is no record of him reporting for duty there. By this time young Bush was a fully trained Air Force pilot, having completed the mandatory two-year training program, yet at this point he let his pilot status lapse. More than a year later—some eight months before his Guard commitment was up—Bush received an honorable discharge, just in time to start Harvard Business School.

Why did he disappear? Did he assume no one would mind if he quietly stopped attending training sessions? Did he simply lose interest? Or did he want to avoid being tested for drugs? (The Air Force initiated a new drug-testing program, coincidentally, in April of 1972.)

Should we care? Unequivocally, yes. Presidential elections are mostly about character, not ideology. No one who reaches late middle age is exactly the same person he was

in his early 20s, but the tendencies that mark the passage from youth to adulthood can provide important information about later behavior. That Bush used family connections to get into the National Guard and then apparently left when it suited him suggests a pattern of evasion or indifference that would repeat itself in later years.

Which brings us to the second aspect of Vietnam that most Americans would prefer to forget, but which Bush perfectly exemplifies. Beginning about 40 years ago, the U.S. government lied repeatedly to Americans about the danger North Vietnam and the Vietcong posed to American security, trumping up a *casus belli* in the Gulf of Tonkin. Vietnam thus marked the beginning of a four-decade-long plunge in Americans' trust of our government.

As president, Bush has replicated this sordid history. He lied about the danger Saddam Hussein posed to American security and came up with his own trumped up “weapons of mass destruction.” Invading Iraq to stop global terrorism has been as disconnected from the goal as sending Americans to Vietnam to stop global communism. As it did in Vietnam, the war in Iraq drags on without a clear vision of what we ultimately want to achieve there. We don't have the slightest idea how to establish a democracy that will ally itself with the United States in years ahead; we don't even know how to extricate ourselves from the morass without unleashing a vicious tribal war. And as was the case 40 years ago, much of the rest of the world is appalled by America's shoot-first, ask-questions-later belligerence.

The radical conservatives in the Bush administration who pushed the United States into Iraq were intent on erasing the legacy of America's impotence and humiliation in Vietnam. Yet they are in the process of re-creating it. And in so doing they are resurrecting the memories of Vietnam.

The two men who are likely to square off against each other in November represent the best and the worst of that national nightmare. Republicans are fond of equating themselves with patriotism, but there's little doubt which of these two men defines the term. ■

**Kerry and Bush
represent alternative
histories of Vietnam.
Only one of those
histories is noble.**

think again

"Prosecutors make their careers playing a numbers game—and there's no better way to pad their stats than by relying on conspiracy charges."

Christopher Beresford Reynolds, a federal prisoner, writing in Legal Affairs

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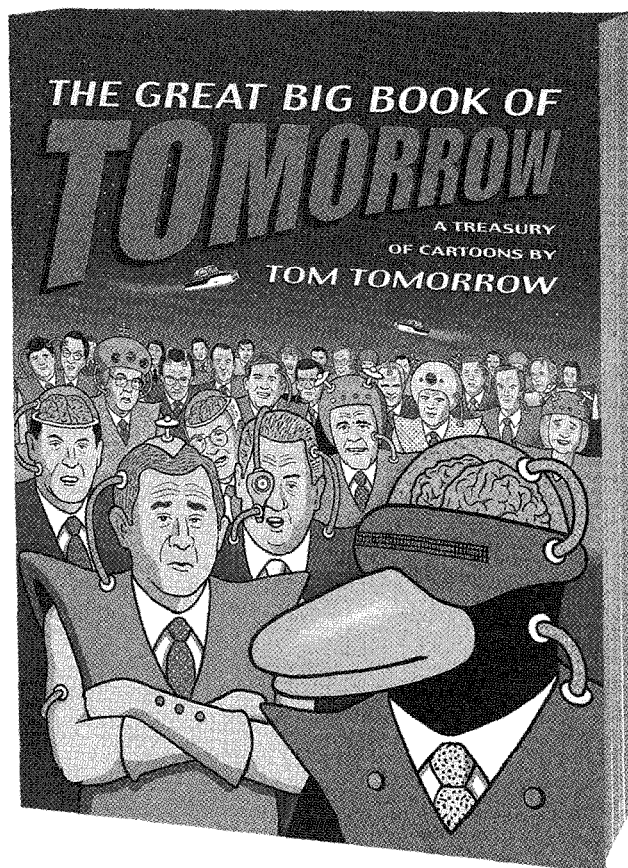
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